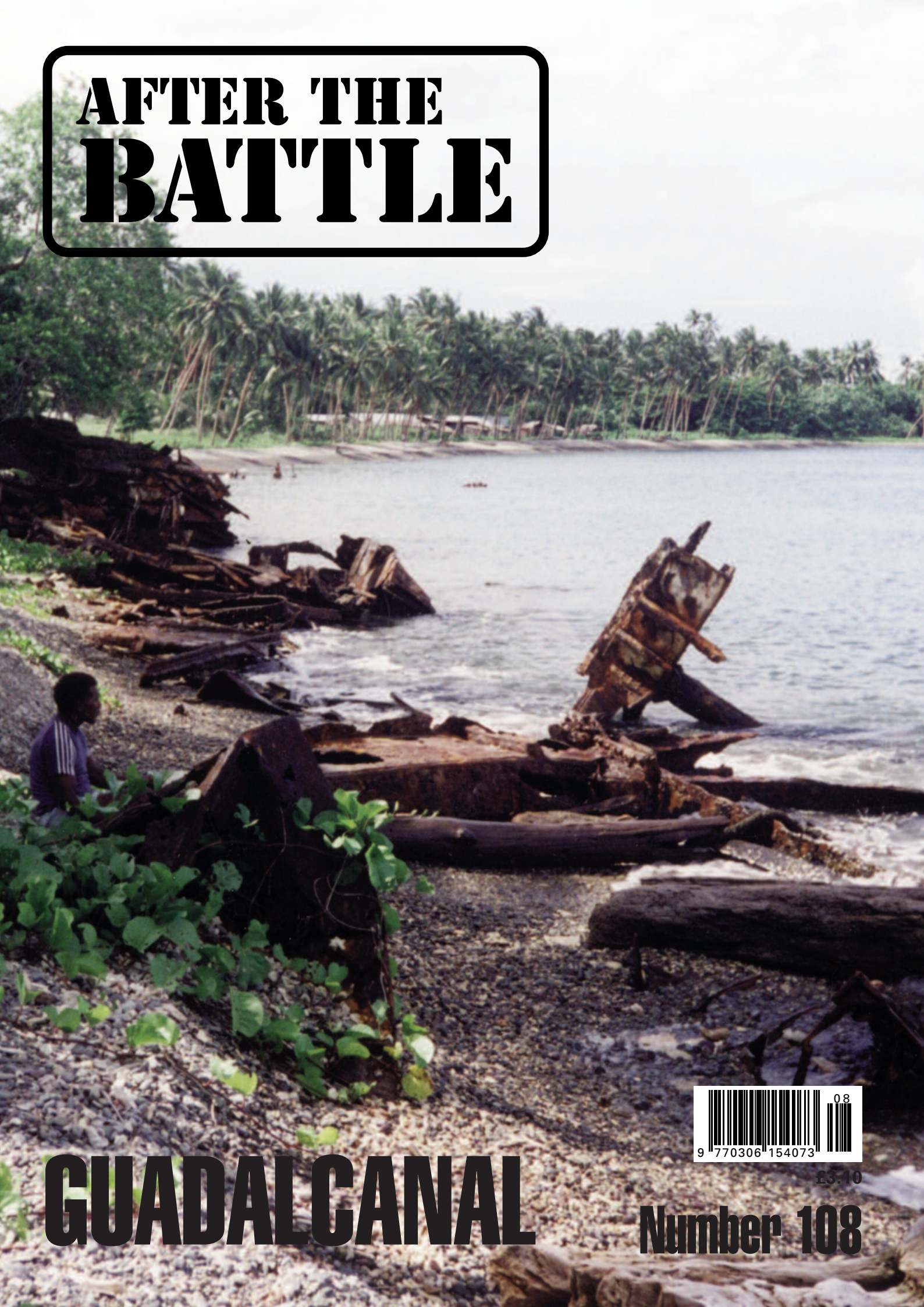
AFTER THE BATTLE



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Editor: Karel Margry
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Telephone: (020) 8534 8833
Fax: (020) 8555 7567
E-mail: (afterthebattle@mcmail.com)
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Front cover: The rusting remains of the Japanese transport *Kyusyu Maru*, wrecked here at Doma beach on Guadalcanal in October 1942; cut up by scrap dealers in the 1960s — see page 13. (Peter Flahavin)

Centre Pages: Guadalcanal pot-pourri. *Clockwise:* Japanese 75mm AA gun at Henderson Airport; relics at Vilu; Japanese 105mm gun; 8-ton Type 92B artillery tractor (David Green); Henderson tower and Edson's Ridge Memorial; F4F Wildcat; Amtrac dump at Tetere beach; wreckage on Red Beach; Japanese 105mm at Honiara; 1st Marine Division plaque at Henderson (Peter Flahavin). *Centre:* The American Skyline Ridge Memorial. (David Green)

Back cover: Recovery and repatriation of members of the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion killed on Makin Island in August 1942 and subsequently buried in an unmarked mass grave.

Acknowledgements: The Editor would like to thank Earl Bushong and Bill Belcher of the Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii for their help with the Makin Recovery story. We are also indebted to Rita Kramer for allowing us to include the extract on pages 50-55 from her book *Flames in the Field* published by Penguin Books, 1995 (pages 11-17). Reproduced by permission of the author.

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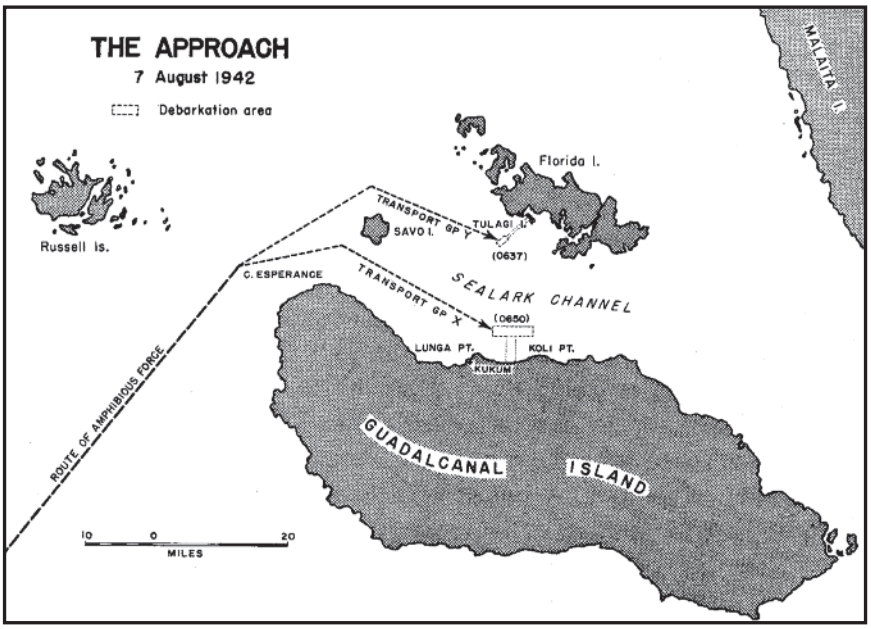
Guadalcanal — a little-known island in the South Pacific — rose to sudden prominence in 1942. The six-month campaign for its possession — a series of savage land, air and naval clashes — was the turning point of the war in the Pacific.

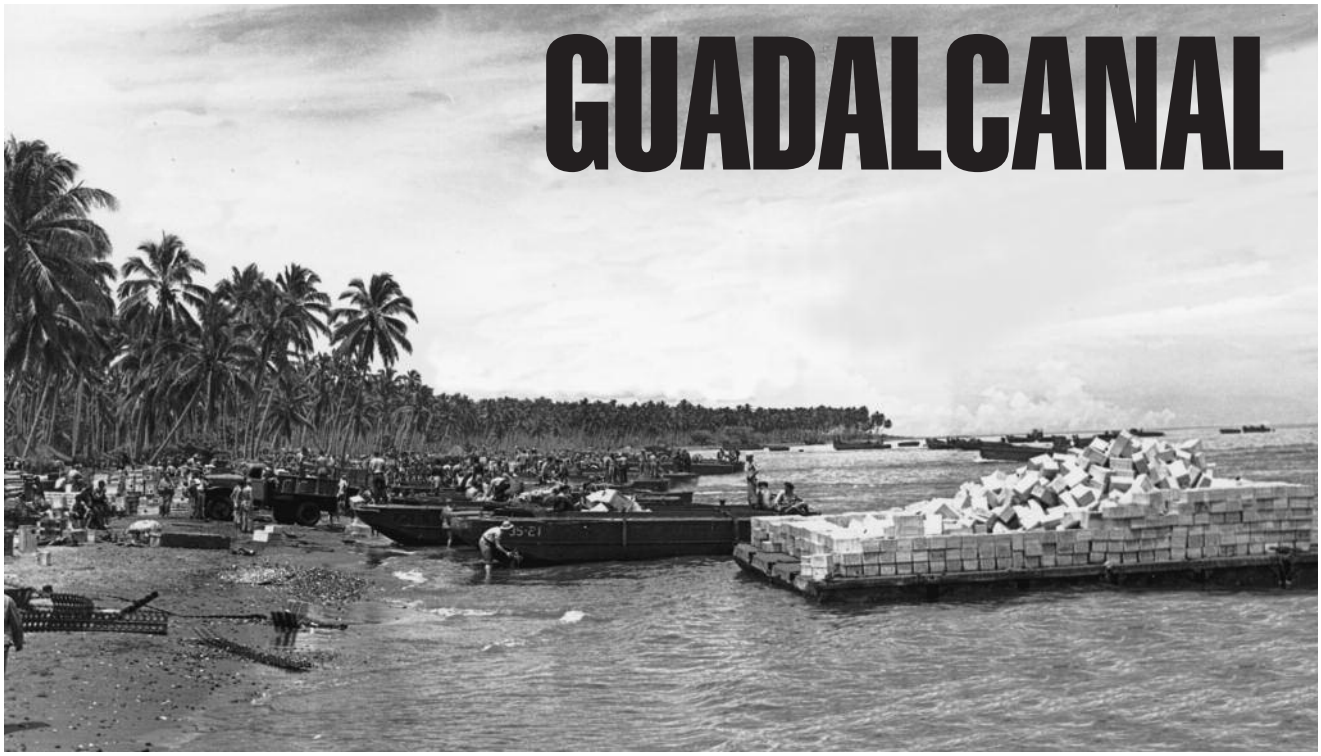
Guadalcanal forms part of the Solomons, an island chain extending over 900 miles through the South Pacific Ocean between New Guinea and the New Hebrides northeast of Australia. The largest of the six major islands, Guadalcanal is generally mountainous, most of the island being covered by dense jungle, deep ravines and grassy hilltops, with the northern foothills descending to a coastal plain. The climate is tropical, with high temperatures, humidity and rainfall. The native islanders are mostly Melanesians. Before 1942, the only white men on the island were a few district officers and civil servants, missionaries, planters and traders. A British protectorate since 1893, the Solomons were governed from Tulagi, a smaller island 20 miles north of Guadalcanal.

Imperial Japan began invading the Solomons in March 1942, seizing the islands virtually without opposition. Tulagi was occupied on May 3, the Japanese taking over the seaplane harbour there, and a first exploratory force landed on Guadalcanal on May 28. By July, the island had been occupied by the 81st and 84th Garrison Units and the 11th and 13th Naval Construction Battalions. The Japanese immediately began to build an airfield on the coastal plain east of the Lunga river. The new base would serve to protect their flank for the New Guinea campaign, support the advance towards New Caledonia and Fiji, and disrupt the supply lines between the United States and Australia.

Faced with the continued Japanese expansion and growing build-up in the Solomons, the American Joint Chiefs-of-Staff, after considerable debate, issued a directive on July 2 ordering the seizure of New Guinea, New Ireland and New Britain. As a first stage, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief Pacific Ocean Areas, was ordered to capture the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi and 'adjacent areas' (which included Guadalcanal). The amphibious assault would be the first US offensive of the war. Nimitz passed the mission to Vice-Admiral Richard L. Ghormley, the Commander South Pacific Area.



GUADALCANAL



Above: **The US 1st Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, coming ashore on Red Beach, a 1,500-yards stretch of shore located about four miles to the east of where the Japanese were building their airstrip. The landings were unopposed, but problems developed later in the day when the shore parties could not handle the amount of supplies coming in. This picture gives a good illustration of the small number of men assigned to handle the supplies being delivered by the landing craft and pontoon barges. The LCPL (Landing Craft Personnel, Large) closest to the camera originates from troop transport ship AP35, the *American Legion*, which brought in Regimental HQ and the 1st Battalion of the 5th Marines. (USNA)** *Below:* **The same beach today.**

By Karel Margry

The task of capturing the islands was given to the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift. When Vandegrift received his orders from Ghormley in Auckland, New Zealand, on June 26, his division was scattered throughout the Pacific: the 5th Marine Regiment had recently arrived in Wellington, New Zealand; the 7th Marines was stationed in Samoa, and the 1st Marines with most of the division's equipment was still in transit between the US and New Zealand. D-Day was set for August 1, which left only five weeks for planning and preparation.

The undertaking, code-named Operation 'Watchtower', was organised hurriedly and with much improvisation. Intelligence information on the target islands was very scarce and good maps practically non-existent. Estimates of enemy strength were inaccurate. There was a shortage of landing ships. Logistical preparations were hampered because civilian dock workers in Wellington harbour refused work under what they deemed unacceptable winter conditions, forcing the marines to work in eight-hour shifts unloading, sorting, and reloading their own supplies. On July 10, the date of the assault was postponed to August 7, but requests for further postponement were turned down. Doggedly, Vandegrift and his staff worked on solving their many problems. Plans were made, orders drawn up. To make up for the 7th Marines, Vandegrift was given the 2nd Marine Regiment (of the 2nd Marine Division), then still in San Diego harbour. He also got the 3rd Marine Defense Battalion, equipped with heavy AA and coastal defence guns, which was to come from Pearl Harbor.

Despite the chaotic preparation, the invasion fleet sailed as ordered. The 82 ships of the expeditionary force (Task Force 61), commanded by Vice Admiral Frank J. Fletcher, sub-divided into an Amphibious Force (under Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner) — which included the 1st Marine Division, their 22 troop and cargo transports, and a number of cruisers and destroyers as escort and shore-fire support — and an Air Support Force (under Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes) which was built around the three aircraft carriers *Saratoga*, *Enterprise* and *Wasp*, and the battleship *North Carolina*. The force comprised what was in effect the greater part of the US Navy in the Pacific. Steaming from points as widely separated as Wellington, Sydney, Noumea and Pearl Harbor, the force units met on July 26 at a rendezvous near Koro Island, south-east of Fiji. Rehearsal landings at Koro, conducted between July 28-31, were a complete failure, which did nothing to raise optimism about the operation. Regrouping, the invasion fleet set sail for the Solomons. Luck was with them, for the Japanese failed to spot the armada. At daylight on August 7, the ships of the Fire Support Groups began bombarding the shores of Guadalcanal and Tulagi, while aircraft from the three carriers (which had taken up position south of Guadalcanal) sank Japanese float planes at their moorings. The American counter-offensive in the Pacific had begun.

At 0909 hours, the US 1st Marine Division went ashore on Red Beach on the north coast of Guadalcanal, some four miles to the east of where the Japanese were building their airfield. The 5th Marines (minus the 2nd Battalion), led by Colonel LeRoy P. Hunt, landed first, with two battalions abreast, followed by the 1st Marines under Colonel Clifton B. Cates. The landings were unopposed.

At 1115, the 1st Marines began advancing as planned south-west towards Mount Austen (1,514 ft), the dominating feature on the island. They had been led to believe that it was some two miles inland, whereas in fact it was about four. By nightfall, the regiment was only about halfway to its objective, so Vandegrift told it to dig in for the night. At 1330, he had ordered the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to advance westwards along the beach towards the Ilu river (Alligator Creek) and dig in there for the night.

Left: **The main objective of the invasion, in fact the sole reason for the whole Guadalcanal campaign, was the airfield on the Lunga plain, soon to become known as Henderson Field. Begun by the Japanese in May 1942, the nearly finished 2,600-feet-long airstrip was captured by the marines on D+1, and General Vandegrift immediately ordered its completion. The Marine engineers and pioneers had been able to land only one bulldozer, so they mobilised the equipment left behind by the Japanese: six road rollers, four generators, six trucks, two gasoline-powered locomotives pulling hopper carts, some 50 handcarts and 75 hand shovels, and a quantity of explosives. There was a gap of 180 feet in the centre of the field and the engineers moved 6,700 cubic feet of earth from a nearby hill to fill it. By August 18, they had extended the runway to 3,778 feet. The very first American aircraft to land on Henderson Field, on August 12, was the PBY Catalina flying boat pictured here. It was in fact the personal aircraft of Rear Admiral John S. McCain, the commander of Task Force 63, who controlled all water- and land-based aircraft in Operation 'Watchtower'. The PBY was flown by McCain's aide, Lieutenant W. S. Simpson, who had come to inspect the just-finished airstrip. After declaring the field fit for fighters, Simpson took off again, taking two wounded men out. (USNA)**
Right: **Looking south across the present-day runway in January 1999. Peter Flahavin, our photographer from Australia, got permission from the airport manager to go out on the tarmac for 30 minutes to take his airfield comparisons.**

Meanwhile, back at the beach, the situation had become chaotic. Not enough men had been detailed for unloading supplies and, as the day wore on, stores began piling up on the beach, with numerous boats awaiting their turn to be unloaded. By late evening the situation was out of hand, and Vandegrift was forced to call a halt to more supplies coming from the ships.

That same day, August 7, the adjacent islands north of Guadalcanal were invaded. Company B, 2nd Marines, landed on Florida Island, which they found had been evacuated by the Japanese. The 1st Marine Raider Battalion and the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, assaulted Tulagi; and the 1st Marine Parachute Battalion came ashore at the twin islets of Gavutu and Tanambogo. The Japanese defenders fought heroically and to the bitter end, but by the evening of the 8th resistance on both Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo had been overcome. The Japanese had 700 men killed, the Americans 144.

On Guadalcanal, the second day had seen a good American advance. The 5th Marines, supported by the 1st Tank Battalion, crossed the mouth of the Ilu river and, encountering only a few Japanese, began advancing along the coast. Crossing the Lunga river over the main bridge, they reached Kukum village, where they captured large quantities of abandoned food and matériel. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, had reached and captured the unfinished Japanese airstrip. The Japanese had fled to west of the Matanikau river.

Despite this success, General Vandegrift had cause for worry. In planning the operation, he had counted on at least four days of air and sea support by the Navy's aircraft carriers and ships. However, even before the landing, Admiral Fletcher had made it clear that he intended to land troops and supplies, and then leave as soon as possible. Now, with the Japanese having launched several air strikes against his fleet off Guadalcanal, with his fighter strength down from 99 to 78 aircraft, and fuel supplies reputedly low, Fletcher requested and got permission from Ghormley to withdraw his carriers. Only a mixed Australian/American group of six cruisers and six destroyers under command of Australian Rear-Admiral Victor Crutchley was to remain behind. It was a decision that has been bitterly controversial ever since, because it left the amphibious force practically without air cover.

Henderson's most famous building — the Pagoda. Originally built by the Japanese on a rise just north of the runway, it was quickly taken over by the Americans who used it as a flight operations centre. It was an unwritten law that the seats on the left were for officers and those on the right for other ranks. The officer standing on the far left is Major Joe Remmer, and seated in the centre on the right, without shirt, is Sergeant Aubrey Buser. (USNA)

A tree has sprung up on Pagoda Hill to stand in for the vanished building.

Above: **Looking across the runway towards the Pagoda. The familiar landmark building would not survive the campaign. On October 14, following the devastating Japanese shelling and bombardment of the airfield, Brigadier General Roy S. Geiger, the commander of the 1st Marine Air Wing on Guadalcanal, ordered the Pagoda bulldozed flat because he suspected the Japanese used it as a fire registration point. (USNA)** *Below:* **Looking towards Pagoda Hill from the runway today.**

During the night of August 8/9 a Japanese naval force of five heavy and two light cruisers and a destroyer under Vice-Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, sent to attack the Allied transports off Guadalcanal, managed to approach the island undetected and, in what became known as the Battle of Savo Island, cripple one Australian and one American cruiser and sink three others. They were the first ships to go down in 'Ironbottom Sound', as the straits around Savo soon came to be called. It was one of the most disastrous defeats ever suffered by the US Navy. Mikawa got away safe, but failed to attack the now defenceless Allied cargo ships lying at anchor off Guadalcanal. However, faced with this débâcle, and deprived of his carrier aircraft protection, Admiral Turner was left no choice but to withdraw all transport ships from Guadalcanal — a serious blow to Vandegrift, since about half the supplies had yet to be unloaded. Thus, late on August 9 the fleet steamed away, leaving the marines on their own.

The 1st Marine Division settled down to defend the vital airfield, establishing an oval perimeter around it. Some six miles long and less than two miles deep, it stretched from just across the Lunga river in the east to the Ilu river (which the Americans mistakenly called the Tenaru, confusing it with the next river) in the west. Working around the clock, and using captured Japanese equipment, the marines improved the airstrip — now named 'Henderson Field' (after Major Lofton Henderson, a pilot killed in the Battle of Midway) — to receive the first American aircraft on August 12.

To replace the Pagoda, a wooden control tower was built later in 1942. By November 1942, when this picture was taken, Henderson's runway had been graded to 5,400 feet, 3,500 of which was surfaced with Marston metal matting. The aircraft taxiing past the tower is a SBD-3 Dauntless dive-bomber. (USNA)

Although all the Solomons tourist brochures claim that the present tower is the original 1942 one, our comparison proves that this is not the case. The present steel tower was constructed in June 1943 by USAAF engineers to replace the wooden one, so it is a wartime original, but not *the* original.

The aftermath of the night battle at the Ilu. Scores of dead Japanese soldiers of the Ichiki Force, killed in the bayonet charge across the Ilu sandbar of the night of August 20/21, lie on the beach near the river mouth. The men in the foreground had actually penetrated to the west bank before they were stopped by the defending troops of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. In the background marines survey the result of the bloody fight. (Because the Americans in the early stage of the campaign mis-identified the Ilu river as the Tenaru, this action is often referred to as the Battle of the Tenaru.) (USNA)

Throughout the Guadalcanal campaign, the Americans would receive invaluable help from the 'coastwatchers': European settlers who had stayed behind on the various islands when the Japanese came, and who radioed advance warning of Japanese land, sea, and air movements. On Guadalcanal itself, district officer Captain Martin Clemens organised a force of native scouts who also on numerous occasions provided vital intelligence on Japanese movements.

First action occurred at the Matanikau, the river some four miles to the east of the marine perimeter. Late on August 12, a 20-man patrol led by the Division Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frank B. Goettge, landed by boat west of the Matanikau to investigate a prisoner's report that the Japanese near Kokumbona wanted to surrender. However, the group was ambushed and only three men escaped alive.

A week later, on the 19th, the 5th Marines launched a stronger, albeit still limited, raid in the same direction: Companies B and L advanced to the Matanikau but, in the event, only Company L was able to cross and attack Matanikau village. Meanwhile, Company I landed still further east at Kokumbona. Together, they killed about 65 Japanese before returning to Lunga Point. This foray — the precursor of similar but larger jabs across this river later on — showed the importance of the Matanikau as a future defence line.

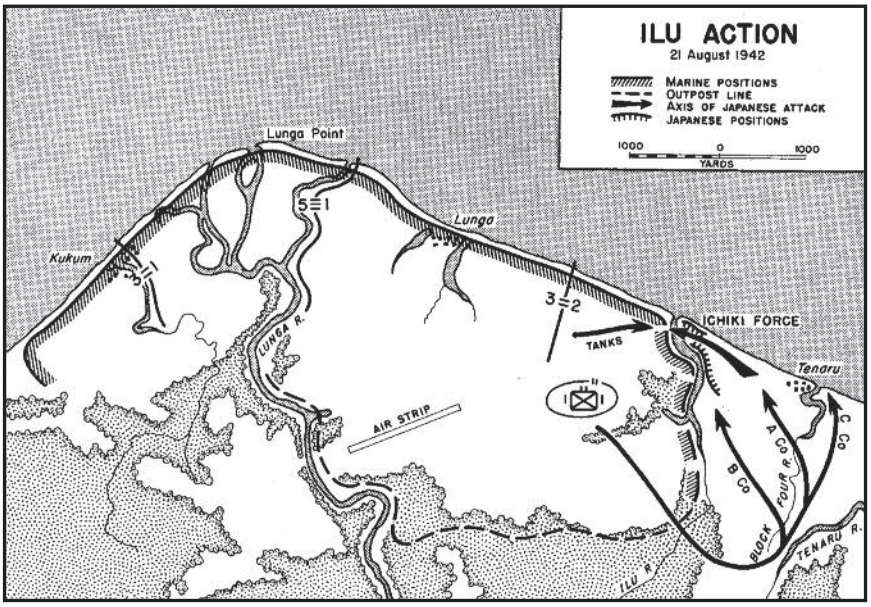
The first Japanese counter-attack came from the other side of the marine perimeter. On August 12, Japanese headquarters at Truk ordered Lieutenant-General Harukichi Hyakutake of the Japanese Seventeenth Army to recapture Guadalcanal. Thinking only a small American force had landed on the island, Hyakutake despatched 2,000 troops of the elite 28th Infantry Regiment (7th Division) under Colonel Kiyono Ichiki to the island to recapture the all-important airfield. On the 18th, a 900-man advance echelon was landed by destroyers at Taivu Point, 22 miles east of the American perimeter. Ichiki was ordered to scout the enemy positions and await his remaining men, then attack. Next day, a 34-man Japanese commu-

Once a scene of carnage, now just a tranquil stretch of beach. Most of the palm trees have gone.

nications patrol was ambushed and killed by marines of Company A, 1st Marines, at Koli Point, five miles east of the perimeter, alerting the Americans to the new enemy force. More information came from Sergeant-Major Jacob Vouza, a native scout who had been captured, tortured, and left for dead by Ichiki's men — but still made his way back to American lines. After losing his advanced patrol, Ichiki decided to attack at once without waiting for his remaining 1,100 men. Japanese intelligence had wrongly concluded that only a 'raiding party' of 2,000 marines were 'cowering' around the airfield, so Ichiki was over-confident. Actual marine strength was then 10,900 men.

At dusk on the 20th, forward marine listening posts detected the approaching enemy column and withdrew to the Ilu. Early that evening, the Japanese force ran into US barbed wire strung on the east bank. Men of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, on the west bank opened fire and the Japanese retreated into the palm trees.

Then, at 0310 during the night of August 20/21, 200 Japanese attempted a frontal bayonet charge across the 45-yard-wide sandbar at the river mouth. Two marine 37mm anti-tank guns firing canister anti-personnel rounds, supported by machine guns and riflemen, cut down the attacking soldiers. Some made it across but these were either killed in hand-to-hand fighting or forced back across the river. A lull followed as Japanese artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire concentrated on the river mouth. Firing was so intense that marines had to crawl the last 200 yards to the west bank as tracer bullets sprayed through the palm trees. A Japanese company, sent out through the surf to attack from the north, was cut down by artillery and small-arms fire.



The Ilu fight was the first in which Americans defeated Japanese troops on land.

blank into the Japanese in the trees — 250 survivors ran into the surf or down the beach to try and escape but were either drowned or shot down. By 1700 hours the battle was over. Some 800 Japanese had been killed, and only 100 escaped. Thirteen had been taken prisoners, only one of them unwounded. Material captured included 10 heavy and 20 light machine guns, 20 grenade dischargers, 700 rifles, 20 pistols, three 70mm guns and 12 flame throwers (which were not used in the battle). Some accounts state that Colonel Ichiki escaped, then committed suicide after burning the regimental flag; others that he was last seen rallying his men and was killed attempting to cross the sandbar. Marine casualties were 35 killed and 75 wounded. Their victory at the Ilu raised the marines' morale immeasurably. For the first time, the myth of the invincible Japanese soldier was broken.

Stopped by the murderous Marine defensive fire, one company of the Ichiki Force tried to outflank the American position by moving through the surf. Detected as they wheeled up to the beach, their assault was first raked with machine-guns, then smothered by artillery. Next morning, the tidal surf had already buried their bodies deep in the sand. (USNA)

Marine artillery fired five barrages into the Japanese positions. Despite this, Ichiki refused to retreat. At daybreak, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, crossed the Ilu upstream and by noon had wiped out the Japanese rearguard platoon and encircled the remaining enemy troops in a 1,500-yard stretch of palm grove.

At 1400 hours, the marines began to attack the trapped Japanese, who resisted strongly and courageously. Five marine Stuart light tanks crossed the sandbar and fired point-

The sandbar at the mouth of 'Alligator Creek' where the Ichiki Force tried to cross, as seen from the Marine defensive positions on the west bank. A staggering total of 800 Japanese were killed here and in the coconut grove across the river. (USNA)

The same view today. Jungle growth has replaced the palm trees.

SBD-3 Dauntless dive-bombers at Henderson Field dispersals, pictured from Pagoda Hill. The aircraft in the top right-hand corner are PBY flying boats. The control tower can be seen in the distance on the far side of the runway. (USNA)

The first operational aircraft arrived at Henderson Field on August 20 — 12 Douglas SBD-3 Dauntless dive-bombers of Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 232 and 19 Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat fighters of Marine Fighting Squadron 223 — followed by five Curtiss P-400s of the Army's 67th Fighter Squadron on the 22nd. From then onwards, the Cactus Air Force ('Cactus' was the US code-name for Guadalcanal) fought daily air battles with incoming Japanese aircraft, attacked Japanese shipping, and supported marine land actions. Working under very improvised conditions, despite critical situations and aircraft losses, the Americans always kept the vital field operational. Additional aircraft would arrive later — more Navy and Marine Wildcats, Dauntless, and TBF-1 Avenger torpedo bombers; more Army P-400s and P-39s — to reinforce air strength or make up for lost aircraft; other squadrons would join and relieve their worn-out predecessors.

Between August 23-25, the US and Japanese navies fought the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, in the open ocean some 200 miles north-east of Guadalcanal. Like at Midway, it was a battle between carrier-based aircraft and ships, none of the opposing surface ships coming within sight of each other. The end was somewhat inconclusive: the Japanese lost the carrier *Ryujo*, a destroyer, a cruiser and 90 aircraft; the American came away with the carrier *Enterprise* badly damaged and 20 planes lost. Yet it was an American victory for they had chased off a stronger force and turned back the accompanying transport ships with reinforcements for Guadalcanal.

Thereafter, the Japanese brought in troops and supplies to Guadalcanal only by night, in small stealthy barge convoys, which however were so regular and swift that the marines soon dubbed them the 'Tokyo Express'. Having realised its strategic importance, the Seventeenth Army sent more and more units to the island. The main formations were the 35th Infantry Brigade under Major-General Kiyotaki Kawaguchi, comprising the 124th Infantry Regiment and the second echelon of the Ichiki Force, and the 4th Infantry Regiment (part of the 2nd Sendai Division). Most of these forces were landed at Taivu Point, eight miles to the east of the US perimeter (where they joined the survivors of the first Ichiki detachment), but because the barges had difficulty passing the American perimeter, some units (2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry; 3rd Battalion, 4th Infantry) were set ashore to the west of it.

Trees now obstruct most photos taken of the airfield from Pagoda Hill and this is the closest possible comparison. The 1943 control tower stands behind the tree on the left.

Vandegrift launched several spoiling raids behind enemy lines on either side of his perimeter in order to disrupt the Japanese build-up. On August 27, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, landed just west of Kokumbona and then advanced back east towards the Matanikau river, reaching it next morning only to find that the Japanese units it hoped to trap had slipped away into the jungle.

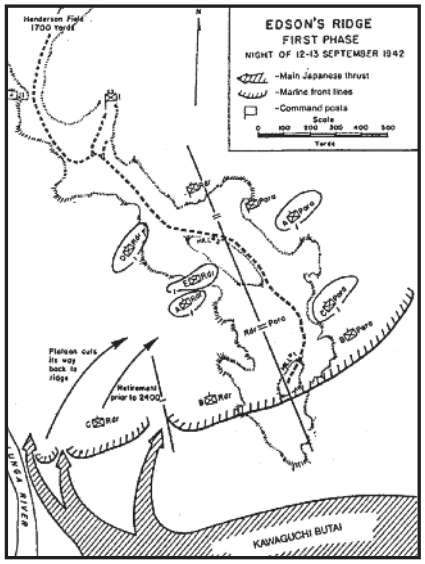
Native scouts had warned the Americans of the presence of Kawaguchi's force newly arrived at Taivu Point. On September 1, Kawaguchi had begun to march westwards to take up position for a new attack on Henderson field. On the 8th, the 1st Marine Raider Battalion (made up to strength by attaching the depleted 1st Marine Parachute Battalion to it) under Lieutenant Colonel Merritt 'Red Mike' Edson landed east of Tasimboko village and advanced westwards to attack Kawaguchi's force from the rear. The Japanese fought hard, then retreated into the jungle, leaving behind the majority of their supplies, which the Americans destroyed before re-embarking for their perimeter. The raid showed that the Japanese force was much larger than the scouts had reported.

Protected by the thick jungle canopy, Kawaguchi slowly but steadily made his way to a position south of Henderson Field. He planned to make a three-pronged attack: the main assault by three battalions (1st and 3rd Battalions, 124th Infantry, and 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry) would come from the south; a battalion of Ichiki's second echelon would attack from the south-east, across the Tenaru; and two battalions (2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry and 3rd Battalion, 4th Infantry) under Colonel Akinosuku Oka would attack from the west towards and across the Lunga.

Left: **Bloody Ridge, immediately after the battle. This is the south-western end of the forward ridge, the sector held by Company B of the Marine Raiders, where the initial Japanese attack of September 12 hit. Note how the very heavy jungle encroaches closely on the ridge. The seemingly impenetrable nature of the jungle caused the Americans to initially discard the possibility that the Japanese would attack the perimeter from this southern direction. Mount Austen towers in the background. (USNA)** *Right:* **Trees, bushes and grass make it hard to take a comparison of anything but growth, but this is the same spot today.**

Anticipating the enemy threat from the south, Vandegrift on September 10 sent Edson's combined Marine Raider/Para Battalion — tired and much understrength after the Tasimboko raid — to occupy a T-shaped jungle-surrounded ridge 1,700 yards south of the airfield, which they fortified and strung with barbed wire. The Raiders were on the right, with Companies B and C holding the forward ridge and a lagoon, and Companies A, D and E (Weapons) on the ridge behind. The Paras held the left, with Company B forward and Companies C and A echeloned to its rear. On the 11th, Japanese bombers on their daily raid ignored the airfield and dropped their bombs along this ridge, confirming that an attack there could be expected. Marine 105mm guns were registered on the ridge ready to give fire support.

In the early evening of the 12th, a Japanese cruiser and three destroyers began to bombard the ridge for 20 minutes, most of the shells falling into the jungle. Then, at 2130, the Japanese infantry came charging against the ridge from the jungle. Striking the marines' left flank, they isolated a platoon of Company C, Raiders, and pushed back the right flank of Company B. Confused fighting lasted all through the night. However, at dawn, surprised at the unexpectedly stiff resistance, the Japanese retreated into the jungle to reform their units, allowing the marines to restore their positions.



The battle of Bloody Ridge (also known as Edson's Ridge) was fought over two consecutive nights, the first Japanese attack of September 12/13 hitting the left shoulder of the Raider position.

Above: **The south-eastern tip of the forward ridge, looking west towards Mount Austen. This was the sector held by Company B of the 1st Marine Parachute Battalion during the initial attack of September 12. (USNA)** *Below:* **The same view today.**

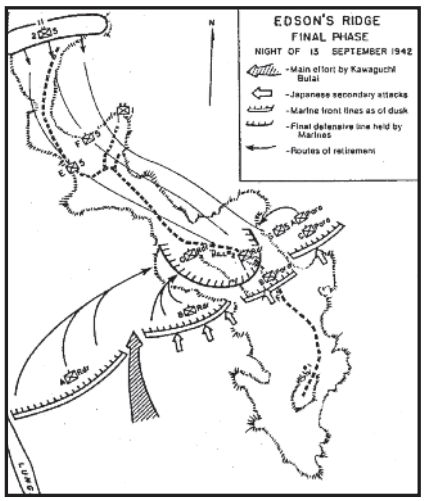
Looking from halfway down the ridge north towards Edson's final position on the northern ridge. The forward companies which received the brunt of the Japanese evening attack of September 13 — Companies B and C of the 1st Parachute Battalion, and Company B of the 1st Raider Battalion —, when ordered to fall back to the final knoll, had to file rearward along the single ridge-top trail, their only protection being the darkness and a curtain of bursting shells. (USNA)

During the day (September 13), Colonel Edson pulled back his lines 100 yards to force the attackers to cross open ground on the top of the ridge. More barbed wire was strung, deeper foxholes dug, better fields of fire cut and automatic weapons repositioned in the face of three Japanese air attacks.

At 2030 that evening flares were dropped over the ridge, seven Japanese destroyers shelled it, and the attacks resumed. The Japanese infantry, some 2,000 strong, now struck at the centre of the ridge. Company B, Raiders, fell apart under heavy blows (its survivors only managed to extricate themselves behind a wall of artillery fire) and the Japanese surged forward down the ridge's central spine. On the right, after heavy mortar fire, the Japanese stormed the Para companies and pushed them back to the last ridge. Edson moved his CP forward and rallied Company C, Raider, the paras and stragglers to defend this final position. Major Kenneth D. Bailey of Company C, Raiders, prevented a possible rout by stopping men and turning them back to face the enemy.

The distinctive meander of the ridge trail is easily recognisable today. Just visible in the far distance on the right are the Henderson Airport terminal buildings.

By now, the marines were down to 300 men. If the Japanese broke through, only the gunners manning the 12 105mm howitzers stood between them and the airfield. However, Japanese troop leaders were confused by the darkness and isolated groups of



Right: **Japanese of the 4th Infantry Regiment killed on the trail in the centre of the ridge. (USNA)**

Above: **Last stand on Bloody Ridge. This picture was taken right on top of the final knoll, looking north towards Henderson Field. Colonel Edson's command post during the decisive hours of the night battle of September 13/14 was about ten feet to the right. Note the very shallow fighting positions scratched into the rise. Had this last position fallen, the Japanese would have been able to advance down the dirt road in the background towards the airfield. The soldier standing in the foreground is Corporal Mike Winters, the driver of Marine photographer Lieutenant Karl Soule, who asked him to stand in the picture to give it more perspective. (USNA)** *Right:* **The view from the final knoll today.**

marines suddenly firing at them, so co-ordination of the attack suffered. In all, they launched 12 assaults during the night, each preceded by a red flare, which drew heavy American shelling to the spot. Marine artillery fired 1,992 shells that night, most of them within 200 yards of their own lines. In the darkness and confusion some 60 Japanese broke through; three were killed charging into the 1st Marine Division Command Post, 100 yards behind the lines; a Jeepload of wounded marines was killed by a hidden Japanese machine gun as they drove down towards the airfield. However, in the face of American artillery, mortars, machine guns, rifle fire and grenades, the Japanese attacks weakened. By 0230 they had fizzled out.

At daybreak on September 14, the Raiders counter-attacked, supported by the fresh 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, and three P-400s which bombed and strafed the jungle flats, driving the last Japanese from the ridge. The Americans had lost 96 men killed and 222 wounded. The Japanese had 708 men killed on the ridge and 506 wounded, many of the latter dying of wounds, thirst or hunger during the long retreat through the jungle back west to Point Cruz. Of the 2,100 men of the Kawaguchi Brigade only about 1,000 survived.

For their leadership in the defence of Bloody Ridge, Colonel Edson and Major Bailey were awarded the Medal of Honor. (Bailey was killed two weeks later on the Matanikau river.)

The other parts of the Japanese three-pronged attack failed as well. The Ichiki battalion's attack across the Tenaru, finally launched at 2230 on the 13th, ran into Company K, 1st Marines, got stuck in barbed wire and was beaten back. Colonel Oka's attack towards the Lunga, at daybreak on the 14th and only two companies strong, was thrown back by Company L, 5th Marines, with artillery support.

Relieved after their battle, marines march down from Bloody Ridge, back towards Henderson Field. The view is to the south-east, the airfield is just to the left outside the picture. (USNA)

The original trail is now completely overgrown, so Peter took his comparison on the track that currently runs from the ridge to Henderson Airport.

The American victory on land was followed almost immediately by a serious defeat at sea. On September 15, a US Navy force was attacked by two Japanese submarines off Santa Cruz. Their torpedoes heavily damaged the battleship *North Carolina* and one cruiser, and crippled the aircraft carrier *Wasp*. After a series of explosions tore the ship, the *Wasp* was abandoned and scuttled. The force had been escorting six US transport ships bringing the fresh 7th Marine Regiment (of the 1st Marine Division) to Guadalcanal. These had withdrawn in time from the danger zone, and the 4,000 marines landed safely on the perimeter beach at Kukum on the 18th — a welcome reinforcement for the battered and exhausted 1st Marine Division.

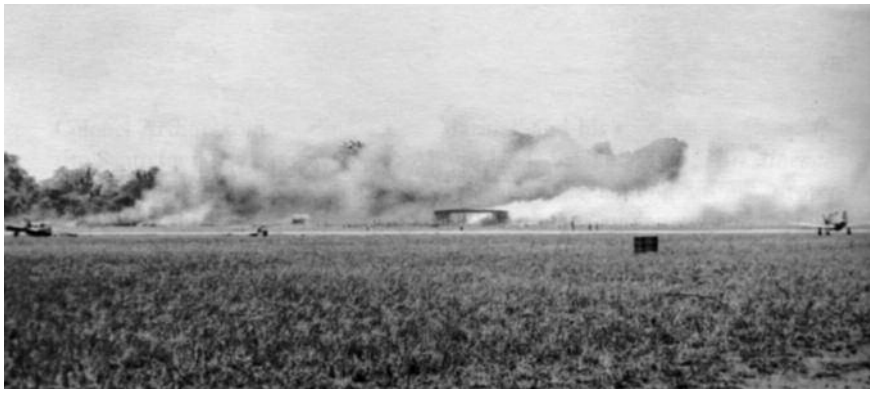
Shocked by Kawaguchi's defeat, but still resolved to recapture Guadalcanal, the Japanese high command halted the campaign on New Guinea to take Port Moresby. In a steady stream of nightly convoys, new reinforcements were sent to Guadalcanal: the rest of the 2nd Sendai Division (Lieutenant-General Masao Maruyama), one regiment of the 38th Nagoya Division, and the 3,000-strong 4th Maizuru Special Naval Landing Force. On October 9/10, General Hyakutake of the Seventeenth Army arrived to take personal command of the Japanese troops on the island.

As daily air battles were fought over the island, Vandegrift continued to consolidate his perimeter defences. Isolated strong points were linked to form a continuous line, trees were felled and grass burned to create free fields of fire, mines and booby traps were laid.

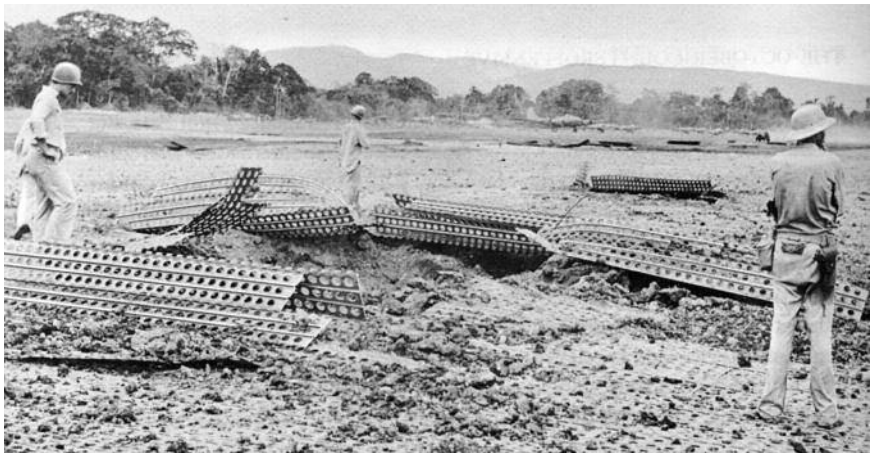
To dispose of the enemy forces concentrated behind the Matanikau, Vandegrift planned a new limited offensive. On September 23, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (under Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. 'Chesty' Puller) advanced inland towards the river. Reaching it on the 26th, it moved down the east bank, trying to find a place to cross, but the Japanese on the far side resisted too strongly. Determined to clear the west bank, Vandegrift devised a new plan. It was along the same lines as the three-company operation of August 19, but now battalion-size. However, when the operation was launched on the 27th, things did not work out as planned. The 1st Raider Battalion (now led by Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Griffiths), which had moved upstream with orders to cross the Matanikau by an inland bridge (known as the 'One-Log Bridge') and then advance back to the sea along the west bank, was unable to do so. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, assigned to attack across the sandbar at the river mouth and link up with Griffiths, was repulsed. And Puller's 1st Battalion, which had landed by boat behind Point Cruz, a mile west of the river, intending to attack the Japanese from the rear, was ambushed on the first inland ridge and had to fight its way back to the beach, where they could barely be evacuated under heavy Japanese shelling. The battalion suffered 24 men killed and 23 wounded.

Despite this fiasco, Vandegrift soon launched yet another offensive on the Matanikau. Its objective was to spoil what looked like Japanese preparations for a renewed counter-offensive by seizing Kokumbona and drive the Japanese beyond the Poha river. The 5th Marines were to advance to the Matanikau river mouth and prepare to cross on order, while the 7th Marines (minus 3rd Battalion), and the Whaling Group (3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, plus the Division Scout-Sniper Detachment) would cross the river upstream and envelop Point Cruz.

This time the offensive succeeded. On October 7, the attack units moved up to the river line. On the 8th, torrential rain held up the operation, but the Raiders fought a bloody hand-to-hand fight wiping out the Japanese company retaining a toehold on the east bank. Also, warned of an impending Japanese counter-offensive, the Americans decided to limit their raid to the Point Cruz area, cancelling an extension of the attack westward towards Kokumbona. On the 9th, the three battalions upstream crossed the river, each one then taking a successive north-south ridge to attack back towards the coast. Puller's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, on the westernmost ridge near Point Cruz, cornered a Japanese force in a deep ravine between Hills 80-81 and 83 and annihilated it with mortars and machine guns. In all, the Japanese 4th Infantry lost some 700 men that day. Their mission accomplished, the enveloping force withdrew back across the Matanikau. As the Americans later learned, their attack had broken up a planned Japanese attack before it could be started.



Japanese aircraft score a direct hit on a hangar at Henderson Field. Daylight bomber attacks and nuisance night raids by lone bombers (nicknamed 'Washing Machine Charlie' and 'Louie the Louse' by the marines) were augmented in mid-October with shelling by long-range artillery ('Pistol Pete') and offshore pounding by 'Tokyo Express' warships. The culmination of this occurred on the night of October 13/14, when two Japanese battleships saturated Henderson with heavy-calibre 14-inch shells, wreaking havoc and destruction on runways, aircraft, fuel dumps, ammunition stores, killing 41 men, and putting the airfield temporarily out of action. (USNA)



'The Bombardment' (as it came to be remembered) of October 13-14 tore great holes in the runway. All day long on the 13th, men of the 6th 'Seabees' (Naval Construction) Battalion raced up and down the strip with Marston mat and pre-loaded dump trucks, each carrying a load carefully measured in advance to fit the size of the anticipated crater, attempting to keep up with repairing the runway — but they lost the race when the Japanese battleships entered into the fray at night. (USNA)

Today, the pierced steel planking has been replaced with concrete.

Above: **To alleviate the aircraft congestion, a new 4,600-feet-long parallel grass strip called Fighter Strip No. 1 was opened one mile east of Henderson on September 8. Although it soon proved almost impossible to drain, the satellite field was an invaluable asset to the Cactus Air Force. When the bombardment of October 13-14 put Henderson out of action, 'Fighter One' was for a time the only available runway. The aircraft in the picture are F4F-4 Wildcats. (USNA)** *Below:* **The area of the former Strip No. 1 is now totally overgrown. With little to orient himself, Peter took this general shot looking south-east.**

In order to give their troop convoys a safer run to the island, the Japanese now began an attempt to put Henderson Field out of action. The idea was to pummel it into oblivion by bombardment from land, air and sea. On the night of October 3/4, the 'Tokyo Express' had delivered two 150mm guns at Tassafaronga and these heavy long-range guns would soon begin shelling the airfield. However, the first attempt to bombard from the sea was turned back ignominiously. During the night of October 11/12, a US force of four cruisers and five destroyers under Rear Admiral Norman Scott intercepted a Japanese force of three cruisers and two destroyers approaching Guadalcanal on its way to bombard Henderson. In the ensuing Battle of Cape Esperance, the Japanese force was turned back, with one cruiser and one destroyer sunk, and two more destroyers sunk by aircraft from Henderson the next day. The Americans had one destroyer sunk and two cruisers and one destroyer severely damaged.

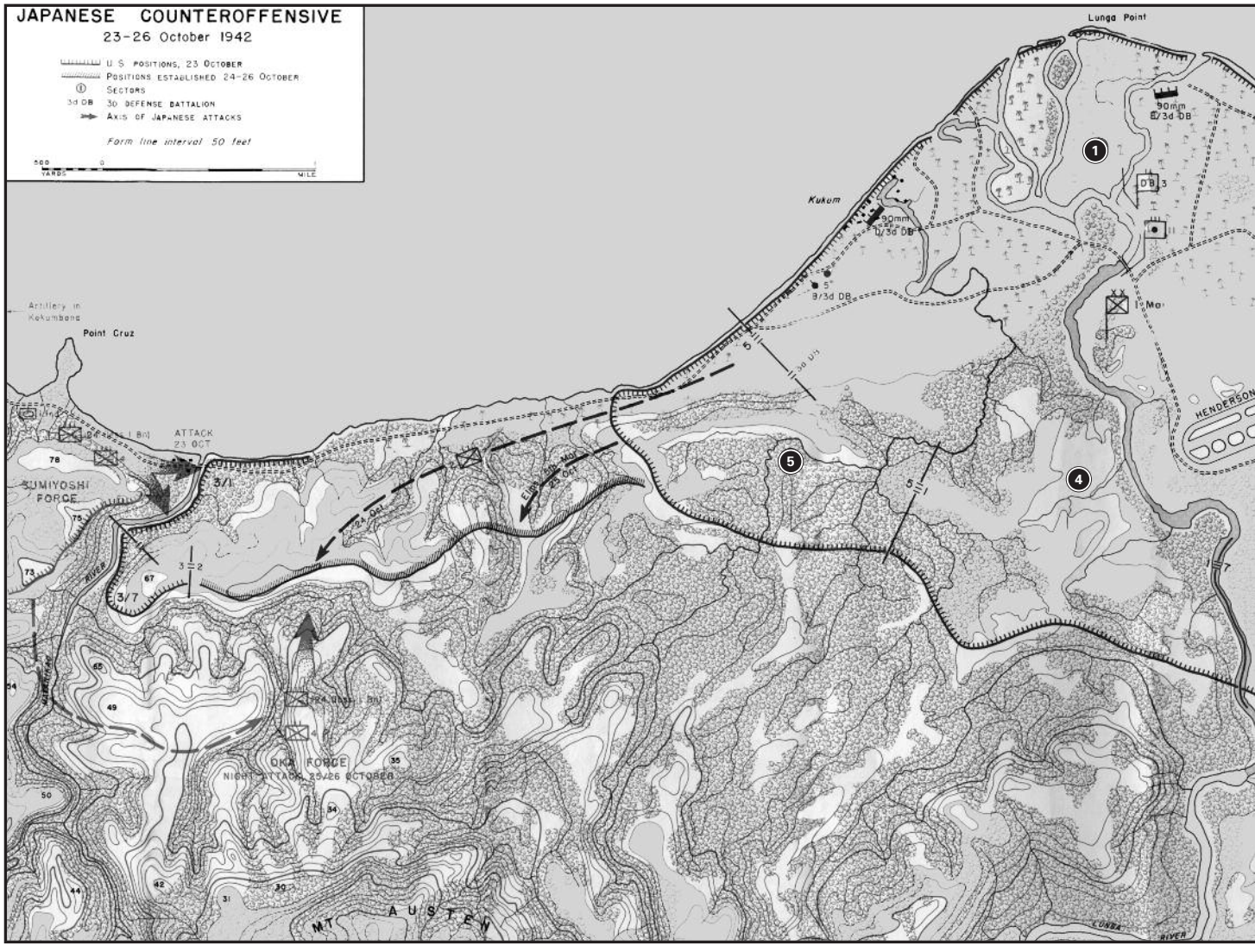
Despite this setback, the Japanese persevered. The next day, Friday October 13, a heavy air raid, followed by the first shelling by one of the long-range 150mm guns (soon nicknamed 'Pistol Pete' by the marines), destroyed planes and fuel dumps and rendered the runway temporarily unusable. That night, battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna* penetrated Ironbottom Sound and proceeded to pump 973 heavy-calibre shells into the airfield, causing more and massive destruction. Yet the marines managed to have Henderson and the adjacent Fighter Strip No. 1 operational again the next day, aircraft from them sinking three out of six Japanese troop transports along the coast at Tassafaronga (ten miles west of the perimeter) caught unloading in daylight. However, the majority of the Japanese 16th Infantry (2nd Division), the 230th Infantry (38th Division), and the 4th Special Naval Landing Force had already disembarked.

Left: **On October 14, a high-speed convoy consisting of six Japanese fast transport vessels began the approach to Guadalcanal, escorted by nine destroyers. It carried 4,500 infantry troops, a battery each of 100mm and 150mm guns, a battalion of anti-aircraft guns, a tank company, and stocks of supplies. Aircraft from Henderson located them before nightfall but only managed to damage one of the escorts. During the night, the transports reached their anchorage off Tassafaronga and began unloading. Thinking themselves safe from American air strikes, after the devastating destruction wrought by the bombardment of Henderson the previous days and nights, they continued to unload after dawn. However, American fighters and dive-bombers still managed to take off and, together with B-17 bombers from Espiritu Santo, attacked the ships. Despite heavy anti-aircraft fire and attacks by Zero fighters, they managed to sink one transport and set two more afire. One of them was the *Kyusyu Maru*, set ablaze by a bomb hit, after which it was run aground at Doma beach. (USNA)** *Right:* **The same bay today, with Bunina Point jutting out from the left and Savo island in the distance. The remains of the *Kyusyu Maru*'s bow are scattered in a pile of metal on the beach; the stern is still in the water. The 75mm gun on the bow was removed later and today sits on top of a ridge at the western edge of Henderson airport, overlooking the Lunga bridge.**

In the early evening of October 23, nine tanks of the Japanese 1st Independent Tank Company charged across the Matanikau sandbar to lead the way for a renewed (albeit prematurely launched) attack into the American perimeter. All nine tanks were knocked out by the Marine defenders, four by a 37mm anti-tank gun and five by a 75mm gun mounted on a half-track. Of the five tanks visible in this picture, the one on the left and the second from the right are Type 95 light tanks; the other three are Type 97 mediums. (USNA)

By now, the fight for the little Pacific island had captured the imagination of the American public. Reports of the initially makeshift character of the whole operation soon led to a demand for change and better organisation. One decision was to send Army units to reinforce the Marine units. Thus, on October 13, the 164th Infantry Regiment (of the Americal Division) came ashore at Kukum beach. There was also a change of command. On October 18, pessimistic and defeatist Admiral Ghormley was replaced by the more-aggressive Vice Admiral William F. Halsey as Commander South Pacific Area.

By mid-October, the Japanese were ready to launch a new counter-offensive. On October 16, 5,500 troops of General Maruyama's 2nd Sendai Division (with the 230th Infantry of the 38th Division under command) began a laborious march through the jungle around the western flank of the Lunga perimeter to attack Henderson Field from the south-east. Maruyama was to attack the Americans from the south near Bloody Ridge again. As a diversion, the 4th Infantry was to make a tank-led assault from the west, across the Matanikau sandbar, and the 124th Infantry an attack north along the east bank of that river. These attacks were to be supported by

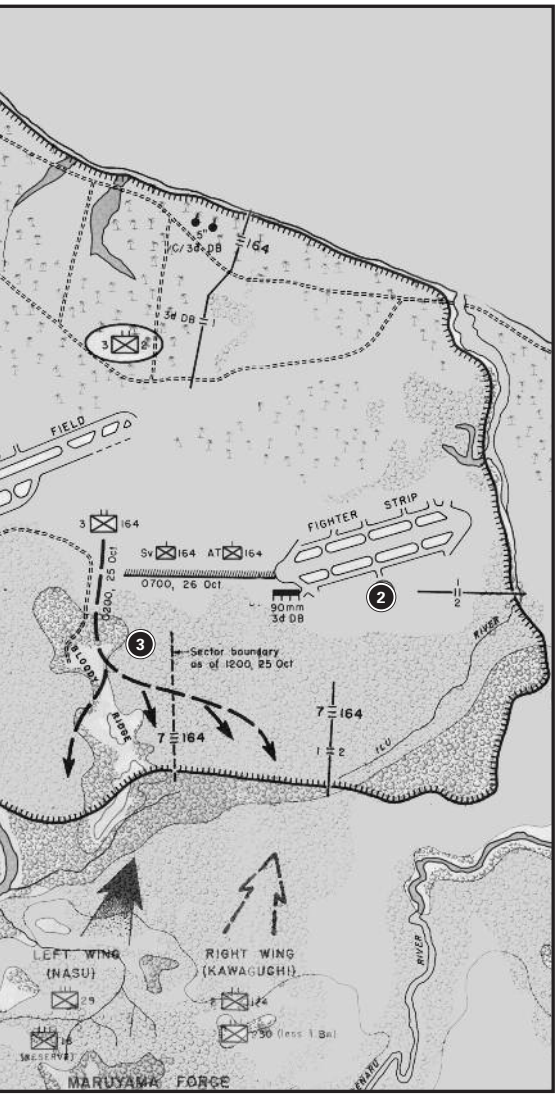


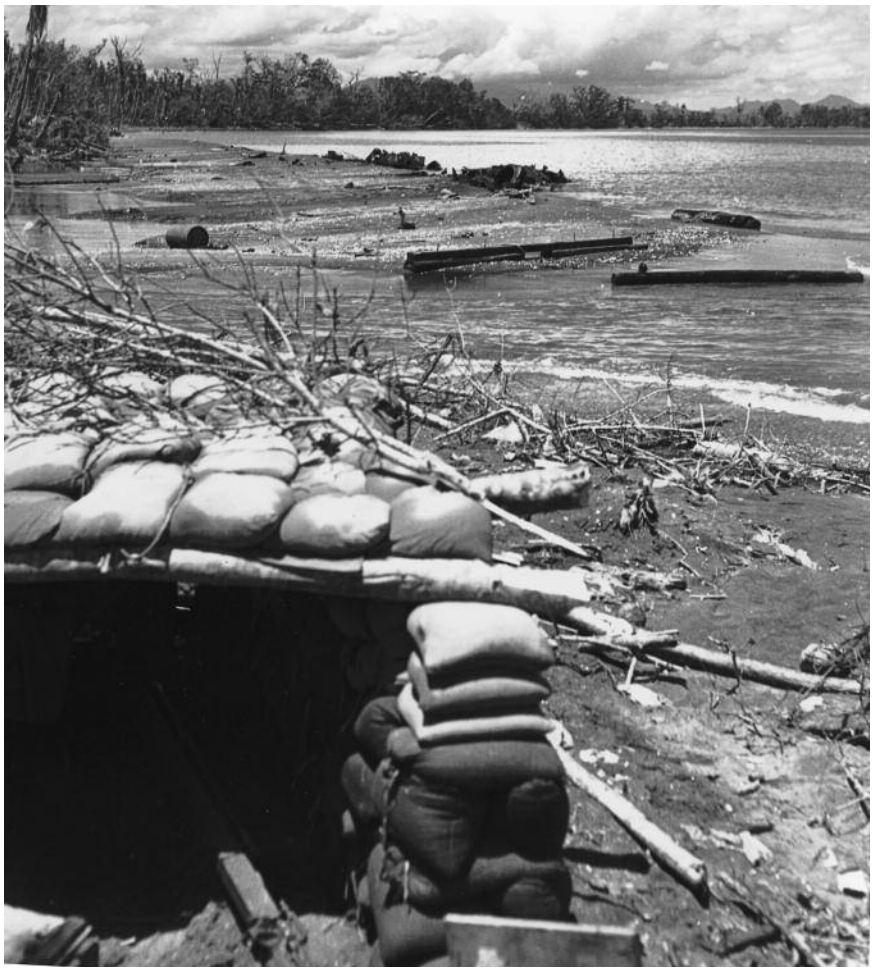
Comparison taken from the car park of the Honiara Hospital on the east bank. Peter comments that sanitary conditions on the beach make the area almost inaccessible.

75mm and 100mm guns, while 15 heavy 150mm howitzers were to shell Henderson. The start of the co-ordinated attacks was set for 1800 hours, October 22.

However, the difficult terrain and torrentious rainfall slowed the Japanese units moving inland. The path which the engineers had to hack through the jungle (known as the 'Maruyama Trail') progressed painfully slow, and Maruyama was forced to request that the attack be postponed, first to the 23rd, then to the 24th. However, the force poised at the Matanikau failed to receive notification of the second delay, and they attacked as planned on the 23rd.

At 1800, after a heavy mortar and artillery barrage, nine Japanese tanks of the 1st Independent Tank Company emerged from the woods on the west bank and made for the sandbar, while the Japanese infantry massed along the tree-line. The sandbar was defended by a single platoon of marines supported by two 37mm guns, a 75mm anti-tank gun mounted on a half-track, and an 81mm mortar battery. The first tank reached the east bank where a marine threw a grenade at its tracks — it was then destroyed by the mounted 75mm gun. A 37mm crew destroyed the next four tanks and the 75mm got the rest. Three other tanks spotted on the far side of the river were destroyed by massed batteries of the 11th Marine Regiment (artillery) dug in at Kukum. The mortars and artillery killed an estimated 600 Japanese infantry in their assembly areas — not one man reached the east bank and the 4th Infantry was reduced to 403 survivors. The marines suffered 25 killed (only one on the sandbar position) and 14 injured.





The knocked-out tanks as seen from the Marine 37mm anti-tank gun position on the east bank. After the battle, some of the tanks were recovered by the Americans and the remaining ones blasted to bits by artillery and aircraft to stop the Japanese putting snipers or observers in them. Today, only one tank remains in the water — its turret can be seen at low tide. (USNA)

On the following night, October 24/25, the area around Bloody Ridge again became the site of a ferocious night battle, when the Japanese 2nd Sendai Division launched the main attack on Henderson from the jungle to the south. By then, the ridge had been better fortified, with trenches and machine-gun posts, although the line was only very thinly held by just one battalion, 'Chesty' Puller's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. In two nights, the Japanese lost 1,000 men in brave but suicidal banzai charges. Here a Marine MG post and trench on the forward ridge. Mount Austen in the distance. (USNA)

Late on October 24, in pouring rain, the Sendai Division finally launched its attack from the south, with the 29th Regiment on the left and the 230th Regiment on the right. They hit 'Chesty' Puller's 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, which all alone occupied a 2,500-yards-long thinly-held line just a little east of Bloody Ridge. Severely pressured, the marines gave some ground, prompting Maruyama to prematurely send the code-word 'Banzai' indicating to Japanese HQ that Henderson Field had fallen. But the marines, reinforced during the night by the 3rd Battalion, 164th Infantry, held on to the high ground. At dawn, having lost at least 300 men, Maruyama broke off the attack.

During the day — October 25, remembered by the Americans as 'Dugout Sunday' — Japanese heavy artillery shelled the perimeter, Japanese aircraft strafed the American positions, and three Japanese destroyers (thinking from Maruyama's erroneous message that they could safely enter Sealark Channel) began pumping shells at the shoreline — until engaged by the 5-inch guns of the 3rd Defense Battalion. Meanwhile, aircraft from Henderson fought terrific air battles with the Japanese intruders.

Clearly recognisable by the yellow grass, one can today easily follow the line of this same trench, still three feet deep after 58 years. The MG dugout now has a 44-gallon drum installed in it and is used as the local village toilet!

At dusk, Maruyama resumed his attack from the south, throwing the reserve 16th Regiment into the fray. Another 700 Japanese soldiers fell in suicidal charges. In the west, a midnight assault by Colonel Oka's 124th Infantry along the east bank of the Matanikau (the regiment had stealthily crossed the river by the inland One-Log Bridge on the 19th) was beaten back in a ferocious fight at a ridge held by the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, in which the Japanese lost a further 300 killed. By October 27, it was clear that the Americans had won what became known as the Battle for Henderson Field. They had held their perimeter and saved the airfield. With some 90 dead, their losses had been relatively light while the Japanese had suffered at least 2,200 men killed.

On the night of October 25/26, as the land battle raged, the next carrier-to-carrier naval battle took place. Two US task forces built around the carriers *Enterprise* and *Hornet* fought a stronger Japanese force of four carriers, four battleships, nine cruisers and 25 destroyers off the Santa Cruz Islands east of Guadalcanal, the result being a clear Japanese victory. The *Hornet* and one US destroyer were sunk, the *Enterprise*, the battleship *South Dakota*, one cruiser and one destroyer badly damaged and 81 US aircraft lost; the Japanese lost 97 aircraft and had the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuiho*, one heavy cruiser and one destroyer damaged.

Left: **The same forward trench, but now looking in the opposite direction.**

Above: **On November 1, the 1st Marine Division launched another limited offensive across the Matanikau river in an attempt to push the Japanese back beyond artillery range of Henderson. Here troops of the 5th Marines, the regiment leading the attack, move up to the river. Just visible on the far right is Point Cruz. (USNA)**

Following their land victory, the marines launched yet another strike across the Matanikau. On November 1, the 5th Marines and the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, crossed three newly-laid footbridges and advanced westwards. By the 3rd, they had cornered and destroyed 300 men and a dozen 37mm guns of the Sendai Division's 2nd Anti-Tank Battalion near Point Cruz. The 2nd Marines and the 1st Battalion, 164th Infantry, took over, but their advance was abruptly halted when Division HQ received warning of new enemy landings on the other side of the perimeter.

Nowadays, trees and huts straddle the Matanikau's west bank and obscure the view of Point Cruz. Comparison taken near the river mouth from the car park of the Honiara Hospital.

Left: **To facilitate the 5th Marines' crossing, the 1st Marine Engineer Battalion threw three footbridges across the Matanikau on the night before the assault. They had spent a week salvaging and preparing material — mainly fuel drums and wooden planks — hauling it to the east bank on the afternoon of October 31. Shortly after midnight, Company E, 5th Marines, crossed the river to set up a cover screen, and between 0100 and 0600 hours Companies A, C and D of the engineers laid the three bridges. Each had a 40-inch-wide treadway, supported by 2-inch by 4-inch stringers lashed to a framework attached to the floating drums. The picture shows men of the follow-up 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, crossing one of the bridges. (USNA)** *Right:* **Though the position of the three footbridges is known, there is little in the wartime picture to identify which of the three is shown. Peter took his comparison near the bend of the river opposite Hill 79.**

Left: **During the day (November 1) the engineers, using a 10-ton temporary pier, built a vehicular bridge across the Matanikau about 500 yards inland from the river mouth. It was brought into use the following afternoon when a new track from the coast road to the bridge was completed. Note one of the three footbridges in the extreme left of the picture. (USNA)** *Right:* **The original wooden bridge is gone, but a wartime Bailey bridge still crosses the Matanikau at about the same spot. It was not until the 1980s that a modern bridge was built closer to the river mouth.**

Early on November 2, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, had forced-marched eastwards out of the perimeter to forestall an expected Japanese landing at Koli Point, the idea being to take up a position on the far side of that point. By the evening of the 2nd, they had advanced ten miles and dug in just beyond the Metapona river, when they observed Japanese troops (300 men of the 230th Infantry) unloading a large amount of supplies at Gavaga Creek near Tetere village, about a mile further on — a fact which the battalion was however unable to report due to radio failure.

Next morning, November 3, the Japanese discovered the battalion and a battle developed on the beach. Attacked from front and rear, the marines began pulling back towards their own lines. When radio contact was finally established in mid-afternoon, the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, was immediately embarked for Koli Point to join 2nd Battalion, and the 164th Infantry (minus 1st Battalion) was despatched overland to attack the Japanese left flank. Next day, the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion, which that very morning had landed with the 147th Infantry in a new bridgehead at Aola Bay, 20 miles behind the Japanese position, was ordered west to intercept any retreating Japanese.

On the 6th, the 164th Infantry, having crossed the Nalimbiu river and turned left, joined up with the two Marine battalions at Koli Point. The enemy (which now included the main force of the 230th Infantry, which had marched up through the jungle after the failure of the attack on Henderson Field) had retreated to the east and set up defences along Gavaga Creek to permit its main body to escape. Two days later, the two Marine battalions and the 2nd Battalion, 164th Infantry, advanced and surrounded the force left at Gavaga Creek. The trapped Japanese repeatedly tried to break out, and many escaped through a gap in the south. Between November 9-12, the Americans reduced the pocket, killing another 450 Japanese and capturing a large amount of stores. The Japanese that had escaped south were pursued by the 2nd Raider Battalion, which in 30 days and 12 separate harrying actions managed to kill another 448 Japanese against a loss of only 16 killed and 18 wounded of their own, before returning to American lines on December 4.

Right: **Later, engineers of the Americal Division extended Marine Trail as far as the vehicle bridge which by then they had built at the foot of Hill 65, some 1,000 yards further on. By January 9, 1943, they had bulldozed it across the river to the 900-foot summit of Hill 55, the northernmost hill of the 'Galloping Horse' feature. (USNA)**

Above: **The muddy track on the Matanikau's east bank leading to the vehicle bridge became known as 'Marine Trail'. (USNA)** *Below:* **Peter's comparison was taken about halfway up the trail, near the foot of Hill 67, almost directly across the river from the US memorial on Skyline Ridge.**

On November 14, 1942, during the decisive three-day naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the Americans sank six Japanese transport ships, and turned back one other, out of a convoy of 11 vessels bringing troops and supplies to Guadalcanal. Determined to land what remained, the Japanese ran aground the four transports early on the 15th near Tassafaronga and began disembarking. With daylight, US artillery positioned at Lunga Point and the destroyer *Meade* from Tulagi opened fire, aircraft from Henderson launched attacks, and by noon all four ships were blazing hulks. One of them was the *Kinugawa Maru*, sunk near the mouth of the Bonegi river. (USNA)

The surviving wreck was a popular picnic and diving spot after the war until it became unsafe and wasps found a home in the hold.

Still, the Japanese stepped up their 'Tokyo Express' operations. Late on November 11, a convoy of 11 transports and a dozen destroyers started down the sea passage to Guadalcanal with 7,000 additional troops of the 38th Division (Lieutenant-General Tadayoshi Sano), supplies for 30,000 men for 20 days, and 31,500 artillery shells. To clear the way, a naval force including the battleships *Hiei* and *Kirishima* came down from Truk to bombard Henderson Field. During the night of November 12/13, the opposing navies began what became the three-day Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. With 14 Japanese and 13 American warships firing at each other in darkness at almost point-blank range in Ironbottom Sound, it was one of the fiercest sea battles ever fought. The Americans drove off the bombardment force, but at the cost of two cruisers and four destroyers sunk, two cruisers and three destroyers damaged, and 700 lives lost. The Japanese lost the battleship *Hiei* (so heavily damaged that her crew scuttled her) and two destroyers.

The next night, five Japanese cruisers and four destroyers returned to bombard the airfield, only to have one destroyer sunk and two cruisers and a destroyer damaged by aircraft from Henderson and the carrier *Enterprise* during the daylight return journey. Later that same November 14, US aircraft attacked and sank six and turned back one of the 11 troop transports.

The following night, November 14/15, in another naval encounter around Savo Island, the Japanese sank three US destroyers, disabled one other and wrecked the battleship *South Dakota*. The battleship *Washington*, left to face the Japanese alone, still managed to chase them off, crippling the battleship *Kirishima* (she too was scuttled by her crew) and one destroyer. Meanwhile, the four remaining Japanese transports doggedly continued on to Guadalcanal, where they beached along the coast near Tassafaronga. After dawn of November 15, American aircraft plus ship and shore artillery smashed them to pieces — but not before 2,000 troops had landed.

The three-day naval battle had turned out a decisive American victory, the turning point of the Guadalcanal battle. Although they had lost more ships than the Japanese, the Americans had beaten off the Japanese fleet and most of the troop reinforcements. From now on, they knew they would win.

On November 13, just before the naval battle erupted, Admiral Turner had delivered the fresh 182nd Infantry (of the Army's Americal Division) to Guadalcanal, landing them on Kukum beach. Earlier, on November 4, the 8th Marine Regiment (2nd Marine Division) had arrived in the bridgehead. As more troops and supplies arrived, the Americans could turn from defensive to offensive operations. But it was still no easy battle. A first offensive to the west, launched on November 18 by the 8th Marines and the 182nd and 164th Infantry, which aimed to advance six miles from the Matanikau to the Poha river, ground to a halt near Point Cruz after six days and heavy losses owing to the strong Japanese resistance.

The beach at Kukum, just west of the Lunga, became the main supply landing point within the US perimeter. Most of the initial reinforcement units came in through this beach as well. These included the 7th Marines on September 18, the 164th Infantry on October 13, the 8th Marines on November 4, and the 182nd Infantry on November 13. These landing craft belong to transport AP39, the *President Hayes*. (USNA)

Left: **All the palm trees lining Kukum beach have been cut down. The area behind the beach is now a joint Solomons-Taiwanese agricultural school.**

'Wright Road', the Jeep trail built by engineers of the Americal Division to support the inland offensive towards Mount Austen. Begun in December 1942, it ran from the coast to Hill 35, being slowly extended until it reached a point just east of the Gifu in early January. It was named after Lieutenant Colonel William C. Wright, CO of the 3rd Battalion, 132nd Infantry, who was killed on December 19, while trying to grenade an enemy position near Hill 35. This picture taken in January 1943 from Hill 29 is looking northwards across Hill 35 to the coast. (USNA)

Peter had to take his comparison a little closer to Hill 35 as trees now obscure the view from higher up.

On the night of November 30/December 1 — in what was to be the last major naval engagement off Guadalcanal — a force of eight Japanese destroyers (sent in to drop supplies sealed in waterproof drums overboard in the hope that they would drift ashore to their troops) was intercepted by a US cruiser/destroyer group off Tassafaronga. The Americans sank one destroyer, but in reaction the Japanese launched a salvo of torpedoes which sunk one and damaged three American cruisers — a clear victory for the Japanese.

At the beginning of December, the 1st Marine Division — exhausted after four months of non-stop jungle fighting — was relieved and sent to Australia for a well-earned rest: the 5th Marines left on the 9th, the 1st Marines on the 22nd, and the 7th Marines in January. On December 9, General Vandegrift handed command of US forces on the island over to Major General Alexander M. Patch, commander of the Americal Division, whose third and last regiment — the 132nd Infantry — had come ashore at Lunga Point the day before. Gradually, the Army was taking over Guadalcanal from the Marine Corps.

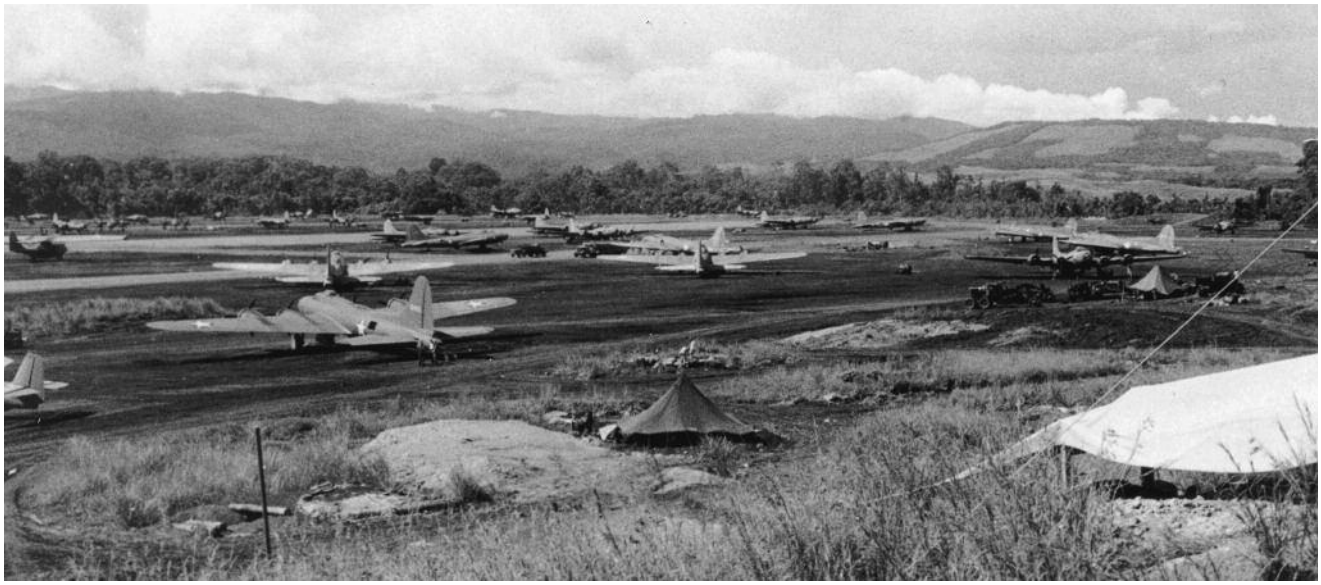
General Patch used the first half of December to build up troop strength and supplies, increase air power, and organise his forces for the final offensive. He could afford the time, knowing his already starving Japanese opponents could not.

Fighter Strip No. 2 was opened in December 1942. Located across the Lunga some two miles north-west of Henderson Field and with a 3,200-feet runway made of graded coral, this satellite airfield was much better than Fighter Strip No. 1 and became the main fighter base on Guadalcanal. (USNA)

As a preliminary to the main offensive, on December 17 Patch sent the 132nd Infantry (Americal Division) to attack and capture Mount Austen. To support the attack, engineers had built a rough, tortuous, slippery Jeep track (named 'Wright Road') into the mountainous jungle from the coast road up to Hill 35. Penetrating into the jungle, the regiment made slow progress, harassed by Japanese small arms and artillery. On the 24th, the 3rd Battalion was halted on the slopes of Hill 31 by heavy machine-gun fire. The Americans had run into the so-called 'Gifu' position, a strong point that would take two months to subdue. Positioned between Hills 31 and 27, west of the summit of Mount Austen, and consisting of a horseshoe-shaped belt of 45 camouflaged pillboxes defended by two understrength battalions of the 124th and 228th Infantry Regiments, supported by mountain guns, it was the strongest Japanese position on Guadalcanal. Patrols could not get close enough to determine the precise extent of the position, but by the 26th the 3rd Battalion had secured Hill 31, finally blocking Japanese observation of the Lunga perimeter. Patrols were unable to find gaps in the enemy line, but on the 29th a 1st Battalion patrol found a safe route by which Hill 27 could be attacked.

On New Year's Day 1943, the 2nd Battalion, 132nd Infantry, marched 6,000 yards from Hill 11 to the southern slopes of Hill 27 and reached it unobserved. They took the feature next day after knocking out a Japanese 70mm

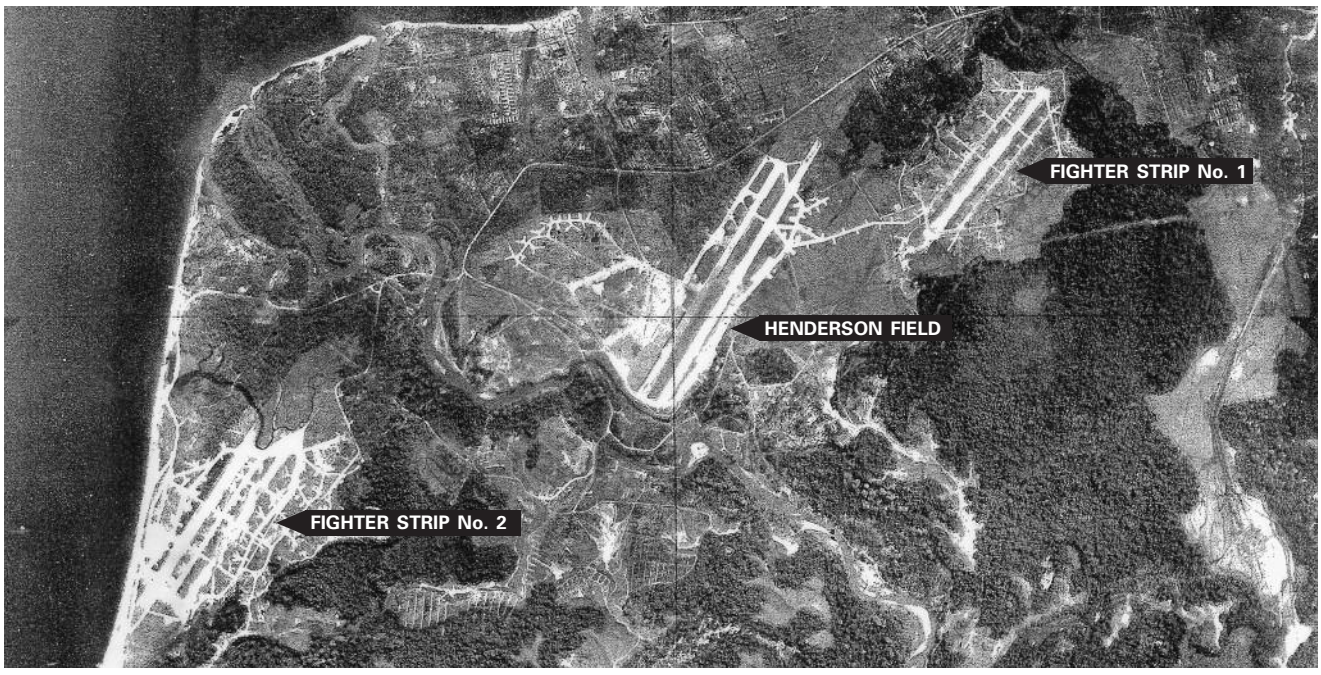
Left: **The former airstrip is today the Honiara Golf Course, with the Solomon Island Brewery behind.**



Above: **The primitive conditions obtaining at Henderson in 1942 — notably the lack of bomb-handling equipment, fuel and ground crews — limited its use by heavy bombers, and it was not until much later in the campaign that B-17s were permanently based there. Before that, B-17s used it only as a staging post for long-distance missions from Espiritu Santo. A few Fortresses of the 11th Bomb Group operated from it in October, but these were flown out on the 14th after the heavy Japanese bombardment of the preceding day and night had left Henderson in shambles; four had to be left behind, two because of shrapnel damage and two for lack of parts. (USNA)** *Right:* **Comparison taken from Pagoda Hill.**

gun and crew, and held it against six counter-attacks. US artillery brought up to Hill 34 shelled the northern slopes and the Japanese pulled back at dawn. Meanwhile, the other two battalions advanced south of Hill 31, killed 40 Japanese, and made contact with the troops on Hill 27. The Gifu was now surrounded from three sides. However, the 132nd Infantry was by now so weakened by battle fatigue, malaria, dysentery and casualties (it had lost 115 men killed and 268 wounded) that it was incapable of further offensive action.

Meanwhile, American strength on the island continued to grow. The arrival of the 25th Infantry Division, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, further enlarged the Army's presence on the island: its 35th Infantry landed at Red Beach on December 17, the 27th Infantry on January 1, and the 161st Infantry on the 4th. Also on the 4th, the 6th Marine Regiment disembarked, bringing the 2nd Marine Division to full strength. On January 2, General Patch activated the XV Corps, comprising the 2nd Marine Division, the Americal Division, the 25th Division, and the independent 147th Infantry Regiment — over 50,000 troops in all.



This aerial, taken in April 1944, shows the three airfields on the Lunga plain in their fully developed form.

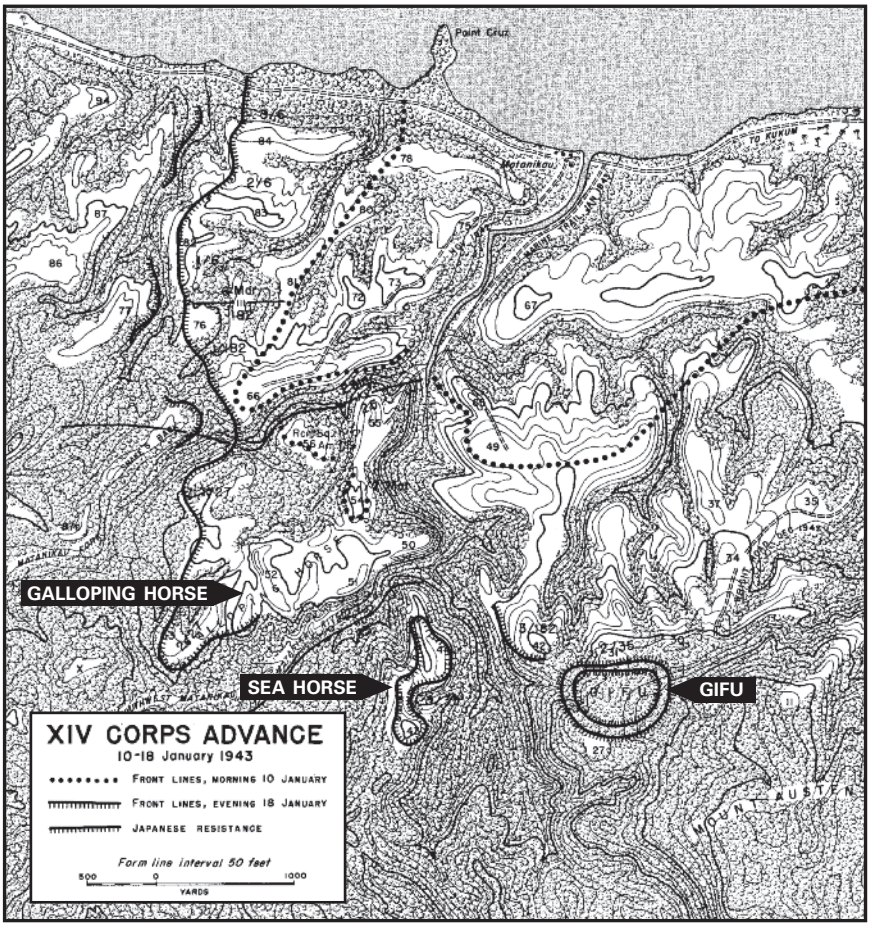
The inland jungle fighting in January 1943 concentrated on three hill positions: the 'Gifu', 'Sea Horse', and 'Galloping Horse'.

Now, Patch launched his big offensive. The 25th Division was to sweep across Mount Austen in a flanking movement designed to push the Japanese back across the upper (inland) reaches of the Matanikau. The 2nd Marine Division (led by the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Alphonse De Carre) was to resume the coastal push in order to trap and destroy the Japanese.

On January 8, the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, began relieving the spent 132nd Infantry at the Gifu. At the same time, the regiment's 3rd and 1st Battalions started out on an exhaustive three-day trek through the jungle and south around the Gifu that would bring them into position for an attack on an inland hill-ridge that dominated the west bank of the Matanikau and (from its shape on an aerial photograph) was known as the 'Sea Horse'. The 3rd Battalion secured the feature on the 11th, while the 1st advanced to the Matanikau on the 16th.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Matanikau, the 27th Infantry between January 10-13 secured a string of open hills sprawling between two inland branches of the river, and named (also from its shape) the 'Galloping Horse'. The regiment's 3rd Battalion, aiming for the southernmost Hill 53, had a particularly difficult time taking the last two ridges before it — known as 'Exton Ridge' and 'Sims Ridge' respectively. However, by the 13th both were in American hands.

The last Japanese position now left east of the Matanikau was the Gifu. Reduction of the strong point proved difficult as very few pillboxes could be located or knocked out by



brought forward via a tortuous jungle trail — and 16 supporting infantrymen drove into the north-east part of the line, destroyed eight pillboxes with 37mm fire and raked the defenders with anti-personnel rounds. On the night of the 22nd/23rd, 100 Japanese tried a last break-out to the south-east but were mowed down. Next morning 85 bodies were found, including the position commander and most of the officers. The remaining defenders were mopped up and by nightfall of the 23rd the Gifu was finally cleared. Some 518 Japanese had been killed and 40 machine guns, 12 mortars, 200 rifles and 38 sabres captured. The 25th Division had 64 killed and 42 wounded. It had taken the equivalent of five American battalions two months, but the last effective enemy force east of the Matanikau had finally been eliminated.

Below: **Today, observation of Point Cruz from Hill 82 is totally obscured by the buildings of post-war Honiara, so Peter took his comparison a bit down the hill, from a point near the Solomon Islands Parliament building.**

In January 1943, the 2nd Marine Division finally pushed the American lines beyond Point Cruz. Judging by the distance from Point Cruz, which can be seen jutting off on the horizon, this forward observation team is probably on Hill 82. (USNA)

anything but a direct hit. On January 14, the Japanese defenders, ordered to evacuate the position, elected to stay with their sick and wounded comrades, most being themselves too starved and ill to walk anyway. Surrender broadcasts by loudspeaker produced no result. On the 17th, US artillery fired 1,700 shells into the Gifu, and in the next three days, the infantry located 24 pillboxes, knocking out seven of them. Small groups of Japanese tried to break out, 24 being killed in the attempts. On the 22nd, a Stuart light tank —

Left: **A Japanese 75mm anti-aircraft gun at Tassafaronga beach, left behind and captured by the Americans in late January 1943. Kokumbona village, the main Japanese supply base during the campaign, can be seen through the trees to the right of the gun. This is also where Company I of the 5th Marines landed on August 19, 1942, during the first of the Americans forays across the Matanikau. (USNA)** *Right:* **With the guns gone, Kokumbona bay remains idyllic as ever.**

Now the American advance west from Point Cruz could really get underway. On January 13, while the inland flank was still being secured, the 2nd Marine Division had already attacked along a two-mile frontage along the coast, advancing 1,000 yards in six days. Since most regiments of the 2nd Marine and Americal Divisions were by now worn out, General Patch now formed the Composite Army-Marine (CAM) Division from the 6th Marines, the 182nd Infantry, and the independent 147th Infantry.

On January 22, the XIV Corps launched its renewed offensive with the CAM Division on the right, and the 25th Division on the left. The inland attack by the latter's 27th Infantry from the 'Snake' ridge to Hill 87 went so unexpectedly swift that General Collins quickly ordered it to continue its sweep across a chain of open hills towards the high ground overlooking Kokumbona. The next day, the regiment took Kokumbona and reached the coast, thereby trapping those Japanese units facing the slow-moving CAM Division. The latter needed one day to clean out the pocket. By the 25th, the 27th Infantry had pushed the enemy back beyond the Poha river.

The final two weeks of the campaign saw the Americans in slow pursuit of the remnants of the Seventeenth Army retreating north-west to Cape Esperance. On January 26, the CAM Division attacked with the 6th Marines on the beach and the 182nd Infantry on the inland foothills. There was little opposition, and daily gains varied from 1,000 to 2,000 yards. On the 30th, the 147th Infantry took over the pursuit. A Japanese delaying force held up their crossing of the Bonegi river for two days, but by February 5 they had advanced two miles and almost reached the Umasani river. On the 6th, the 161st Infantry (25th Division) passed through the 147th to continue the pursuit. Against light resistance they crossed several rivers, reaching Doma Cove on the 8th.

Meanwhile, on February 1, General Patch had embarked the reinforced 2nd Battalion, 132nd Infantry, in six LCTs and landed it at Verahu, a village on the far side of Cape Esperance, with orders to move north-west along the shore and trap the retreating Japanese from behind. However, the Americans were too slow. By the time the battalion rounded the Cape and linked up with the 161st Infantry near Tenaro on the 9th, the Japanese had escaped.

As early as January 4, Japanese Imperial Headquarters had finally acknowledged defeat and begun making preparations for evacuating its troops from the island. Orders for the retreat had reached General Hyakutake on the 15th, and the withdrawal started on the night of the 22nd/23rd. In three skilful nightly operations — on February 1/2, 4/5 and 7/8 — Japanese destroyers picked up about 10,600 men, evacuating them to Buin and Rabaul.

The battle for Guadalcanal was over. Of the 60,000 American troops who fought on the island, 1,769 had been killed and 4,245 wounded. (The 1st Marine Division bore the heaviest burden: 774 killed and 1,962 wounded.) Of the 36,000 Japanese, 14,800 were killed or missing, a staggering 9,000 died of disease and hunger, 1,000 were taken prisoner and some 13,000 evacuated. Each side lost about 25 major warships, ship crew losses being 4,911 for the US and at least 3,543 for the Japanese. Aircraft losses were about the same, 615 for the US and 683 for Japan, but the Japanese had lost from two to four times as many airmen as the 420 casualties suffered by the US. For the Japanese these sea and air losses could not be replaced — particularly the loss of experienced flight crews was a mortal blow. Guadalcanal was the turning point in the Pacific war. After Guadalcanal, Japan never advanced again and started on the long road to defeat.

A Jeep of the 2nd Marine Division crossing the Bonegi river in January 1943, during the final pursuit of the Japanese. (USNA)

The present-day bridge was built by the Japanese in 1995, a 'gift of the people of Japan'.

Peter Flahavin from Australia, who took our comparison photographs, has explored the Guadalcanal battlefield four times since 1995, and the report of his most recent visit gives a good description of what remains to be seen today. *Above:* Memorial pillars to (L-R) the Marine Raiders, the 1st Marine Division, and the Coastwatchers and Solomon Scouts, outside the Henderson Airport domestic terminal. As the slab plaque on the right explains, the remains of an unknown US marine are buried beneath the monument as a symbol for those still missing. Behind the flagpoles stands a Japanese Type 95 75mm anti-aircraft gun.

GUADALCANAL TODAY

By Peter Flahavin

After my earlier battlefield exploration visits to Guadalcanal — in 1995 and 1996 with my friend Rod Bellars, and in 1998 with Leo Groenendyk and Leigh McCann — this was going to be my fourth expedition to the island.

Thursday, January 14, 1999

I arrived at Henderson Airport from Brisbane at 1.35 a.m. at the brand-new International Terminal Building, which opened last August (very nice). It was built by the Japanese Kitano firm (during its construction, the Japanese flag was flying out front next to the Solomon's flag!) and is located on the former camp area of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, before they were engaged in the Ilu river battle of August 21, 1942.

Across the road, in front of the old terminal building (now the domestic flights terminal), are memorial plaques to the 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions, the Marine Raiders, the Coastwatchers and Solomon Islanders. Inside, various other American memorial plaques adorn the walls. Facing the road is a good condition Japanese Type 95 75mm AA gun — originally sited in the palm grove across the road.

The main road in front of the terminal was once the taxiway, and the wartime control tower still stands as a good reference point. This is not the 'original' wooden 1942 tower, but one built later in June 1943 by US Air Force engineers. At its foot is a concrete air raid shelter (excavated in 1992), a monument to the battle of Edson's Ridge, and a Seabees memorial. The view from the tower is very good and you can easily identify the aircraft dispersal areas, Fighter Strip No. 1, Pagoda Hill (overgrown) and the New Zealand camp (likewise overgrown). Edson's Ridge looms in a direct line south of the tower — very close indeed. The old Japanese hangars south of the field are long gone, but the concrete foundation stones remain.

Across the road from the tower are Pagoda Hill and the plane revetment areas, now heavily overgrown with trees, bushes, and tall grass. Concrete foundation slabs of long-gone huts can be seen. The Pagoda flight operations hut was bulldozed in October 1942, but the Communications Centre tunnels and rooms dug into the hills are still intact and dry, although with entrances overgrown and now populated by bats.

Henderson's runway was lengthened towards the Ilu river (eastern) end in 1978, so some of the original field area that bordered on the Lunga river in the west is now overgrown. There are some overgrown roads and buildings along the road to Edson's Ridge. We found a US 90mm AA shell case here in 1996.

Of course every house or hut in the vicinity had fencing made out of matting from the airfield. Overlooking the bridge across the Lunga river is a Japanese 75mm gun. I am told this was once mounted on the bow of the Japanese transport *Kyusyu Maru*, beached west of Honiara.

The air raid shelter on Henderson, as seen from the wartime control tower.

Memorial to the Battle of Bloody Ridge (Edson's Ridge) beside the control tower.

The small memorial to the Seabees (naval construction battalions).

Between Henderson Airport and Honiara, a short distance south of the Lunga bridge on the west bank, is the Betikama Seventh Day Adventist mission. Here they have a very interesting collection of gear: a Dauntless dive-bomber, a P-400 ground-attack fighter, three Japanese 37mm anti-tank guns, a Japanese 75mm field gun, an American copy of the French WW1 75mm gun, plus one of the original American tractors from the airfield. A storm in 1998 took the left wing off the Dauntless, exposing the wing fuel tank, and knocked the P-400 from its stand. The Dauntless belonged to Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 132. On December 1, 1942, Captain William S. Spang crashed it into trees attempting a night landing. Spang was killed, but his gunner survived. The engine lies nearby.

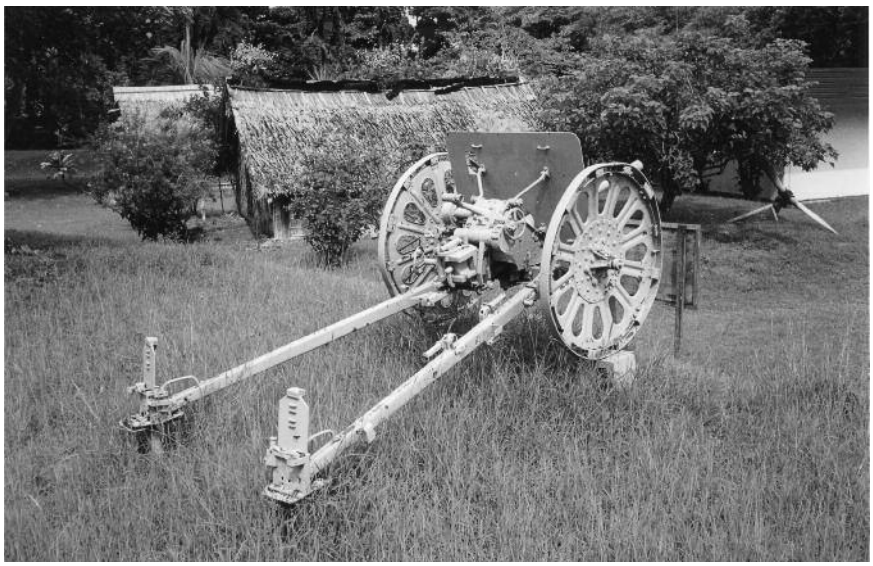
The Bren Gun carrier on display is pretty sick — lying on its side and the armour rotted. This could be one of 13 landed in October 1942 or maybe one brought in later by New Zealand troops. They also have a good collection of rifles, helmets, grenades, field equipment. and some good US Army photos on the wall. In 1996 the machine guns were taken out of the collection and secured. It seemed that any weapon not nailed down was liable to be stolen by the Bougainvillians for their struggle with the Papua New Guinea government.

War relics in the grounds of the Betikama mission school. *Above:* **Japanese 37mm anti-tank gun in foreground, with Captain Bill Spang's crashed Dauntless behind.** *Below left:* **Universal carrier.** *Below right:* **American Cletrac M2 airfield tractor. Two of these were dug up by school students in 1982.**

Driving into Honiara from Henderson you pass the Honiara Golf Course, which used to be the site of Fighter Strip No. 2. It was from here that the P-38 fighters that shot down Admiral Yamamoto in April 1943 took off (see *After the Battle* No. 8).

Honiara, the capital town of the Solomons, is an entirely post-war development which has sprung up along the coast, stretching from Henderson Field in the east to beyond Point Cruz in the west. This means that several important battle sites — like Kukum beach, the Matanikau sandbar, or Hill 83 — are now enveloped in modern urbanisation. Its new roads and housing construction have destroyed many battle area positions and relics.

I got to the King Solomon Hotel (on Hill 83) at 2.40 a.m., at which point I realised that I had left the keys to one of my bag padlocks at home. Luckily I was able to open it with a pair of pliers from my other bag (brought to souvenir some wire from Edson's Ridge). I finally got to bed about 3 a.m.



Japanese 37mm gun outside the National Museum.

Friday, January 15, 1999

After breakfast I walked down to the Customs building at Point Cruz to see my friend Timothy Inifiri, whom I had met in 1998. I gave him a book on Guadalcanal and some other paperwork for his wife Margaret, who is a teacher at the Honiara High School on the east bank of the Matanikau river. Timothy said he could drive me around on the weekend and had a friend, Milay, who could drive me during the week. We arranged to meet at the hotel at 2 p.m.

I bought some malaria tablets downtown and then went to the National Museum on Mendana Avenue to talk to Lawrence Foanaota, the Director (whom I first met in 1995), and give him a book on Guadalcanal and some other items. In the course of conversation he said that at present there is no more discussion of changing the name of the airport. I noted on the new terminal it said 'Henderson International Airport' in big gold letters. No more of this Jap-inspired change-the-name stuff! Former Coastwatcher Martin Clemens has told me the same thing was tried 20 years ago too.

In the grounds of the National Museum is the best-preserved Japanese artillery piece on the island: a 95 per cent complete 37mm anti-tank gun recovered from the Mount Austen area. It was previously outside the Tourist Office. In the park next to the museum is one of the Japanese 150mm guns that were used to shell Henderson Field. (The tractor that towed this particular gun is now at a village near Lela beach, a few miles to the east.) A bit down the road, at the Guadalcanal Tennis Club (the G-Club), is another 150mm gun. This was originally sited west of Honiara in a palm grove near the wreck of the *Kyusyu Maru*.

The beach behind the tennis club is where the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, landed on September 27, 1942. They moved 500 yards inland to the top of Hill 83 (where the King Solomon Hotel is now), where they were trapped by the Japanese. Supported by naval gun-fire they withdrew to the beach between the tennis club and the Mendana Hotel (now the site of the National Gallery and Prime Minister's office), where they were taken off by landing craft under heavy enemy fire from Point Cruz. Coast Guard coxswain Signalman 1st Class Douglas A. Munro was killed here using his craft to shield the others in an act of bravery for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

After seeing Lawrence I went for a walk east towards the Matanikau river. Stopping at the market I looked at the stall of Samuel Poa, the guy who sells the wartime dated Coca-Cola bottles. He had about 40 for sale, plus some battered American mess trays together with a quantity of .50- and .30-calibre cartridge cases. Near the Matanikau bridge are about six remaining US Nissen huts from 1944-45.

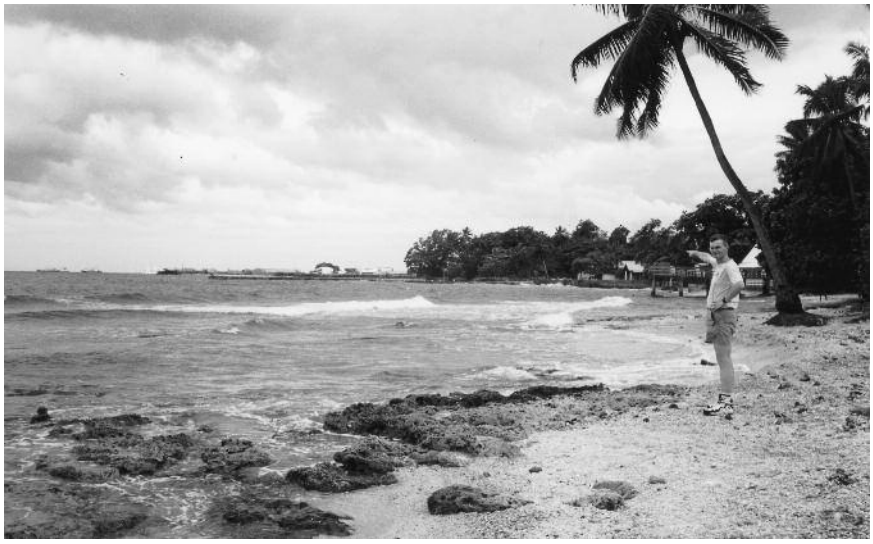
I walked down to the west bank and along the beach where Marine Colonel Frank Goettge and his patrol were killed on August 12, 1942. I talked to a lot of local kids and teenagers and showed them my 1942 comparison photos. They were very interested, so I gave them many of the photocopies.

As we walked down to the Matanikau sandbar, the smaller kids kept pointing to the beach and shouting 'Japani tank! Japani tank!' They were of course referring to what remains of the nine Japanese tanks that were knocked out here on October 23, 1942. Photos from 1942 show at least five disabled tanks on the sandbar, but most of these were later blown up. Coastwatcher Martin Clemens has told me that he inspected these tanks and found a bottle of alcohol in every turret! Today, only one tank hull remains in the water, sunk in the sandbar and only visible at low tide. It was high tide this time, so I could not see the turret above the waves. There were three kids out there using it as a diving board and having a great time.

The sandbar area is now covered by lots of huts of refugees from Bougainville, and sanitation leaves a lot to be desired. In 1995, having walked along the shore, it took us two hours to scrub the soil and shit (and I do mean shit) off our shoes and they smelt for weeks. So in 1996 we took the comparison photo from the edge of the Honiara Hospital car park on the east bank — this was the closest shot possible. One guy was looking at us rather suspiciously and asked what we were doing, but when we showed him the 1942 photos he became quite interested and lightened up. As we returned to the car, our taxi driver was cracking up laughing. When we asked him why he said 'because the area in the water around the tank is the women's toilet — he thought you were trying to take photos of them. Sorry, I should have told you!'

The area around the Matanikau bridge is where the 1st Marine Raider Battalion fought the Japanese company that had a bridgehead on the east bank on October 7-9, 1942.

I walked up the Matanikau east bank through Chinatown to the bend of the river and the Bailey bridge we crossed in 1998. Just a little further upstream was the site of the original 'One-Log Bridge'. Honiara High School is a little farther up the road. Timothy said his son had found a couple of cartridge cases in the playground recently. After taking some photos I crossed the bridge back to the west bank and walked up Hill 82 to take another shot of the old US Nissen huts (still being used) across the road and enjoy the view towards Lunga. The day was warming up now, so I went back to the hotel and spent 30 minutes in the pool.



Peter standing on the beach where the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, made their ill-fated landing on September 27, 1942. He is pointing to Point Cruz from where the Japanese held the marines under heavy fire during their withdrawal later in the day.

The Japanese memorial on Edson's Ridge, dedicated to the soldiers of both nations.

Timothy introduced me to Milay at 2 p.m. and then he had to go back to work. Milay and I drove to Edson's Ridge battlefield. When I first went there in 1995 I only had a basic idea of the battle, but I have read a lot more since then. Much of the surrounding jungle has been cut back in the last decades and some huts have gone up there since 1992.

On the southernmost ridge is a Japanese memorial dedicated to peace and the soldiers of both nations who fought here. The forward slope is still covered in barbed wire and stakes, so you have to watch your step. Along the spur to the east is a 1944 Nissen hut, and there are recognisable US foxholes along the area where Company C, 7th Marines, fought and machine-gun squad leader Sergeant John Basilone won his Medal of Honor on October 24/25, 1942.

On the knoll further back that was the final Marine defensive position on September 13, 1942, is an American memorial near the site of Colonel Edson's command post. Barbed wire and stakes remain on its forward slope, and the trench indentations are visible, especially after the tall grass has been burnt off. In 1995-96 we walked the ground and found cartridge cases, belt clips, a .45-calibre bullet, a US 2 cent piece, and a Japanese helmet with a bullet hole near Marine Para positions on the left flank of the ridge.

The American memorial on Edson's Ridge, near the 'final knoll'.

The local kids on the ridge usually have all kind of relics on offer. After each periodic burning-off new items come to light. In 1996, Rod was offered a US Army dog-tag marked to Edwin W. Geiger. (In 1999 I received a letter from Florida letting me know he was still alive and that he remembered losing his dog-tag — 2nd Lieutenant, 247th Field Artillery Battalion, Americal Division.) In 1998, I got a Japanese mess tin here marked 'II/4' (the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Infantry Regiment spearheaded the assault down the spine of the ridge — 60 men broke through before they were mopped up in the rear).

Sometimes, the locals offer you a mint (live) grenade, but these I refuse. I always make sure to warn the locals of the dangers of unexploded ordnance — the Solomons bomb disposal squad periodically collect ordnance and blow it at Lunga Point.

In 1995, a 40-minute walk into the jungle south of the ridge brought us to the tail section of a shot-down Betty bomber. At the foot of the ridge was the tail fin lying against a tree — obviously carried out and on its way to being stolen. We alerted the museum and they were back there two hours later — but too late. It had been filched in the meantime by 'two white men in a truck'. They said it is a problem — aircraft relics being stolen and shipped out of the country to overseas collectors. In 1996, a friend returned to the site and found the whole tail gone!

As we got to the ridge this time, the first think I noted was that the sign saying 'Bloody Ridge' at the foot of the final knoll had gone — only the pole remained. Good thing I took a photo of it in 1998. The memorial pyramid near Edson's command post was dirty and run down and needed a clean and to have the grass cut away from it. Walking down the ridge road, we picked up one expended US .30-calibre cartridge case lying on the track.

I was wondering if there would be more huts on the ridge after we were told last year that the area had been sold for S$8,000 (US$2,000) to become a housing estate. (According to the villagers, the Japanese Embassy had bought three acres of the site so that new houses would not encroach on their memorial.) I only noted two new huts as we reached the first ridge. The kids that were usually around with relics were nowhere to be seen and the hut owners that usually had some said they had none.

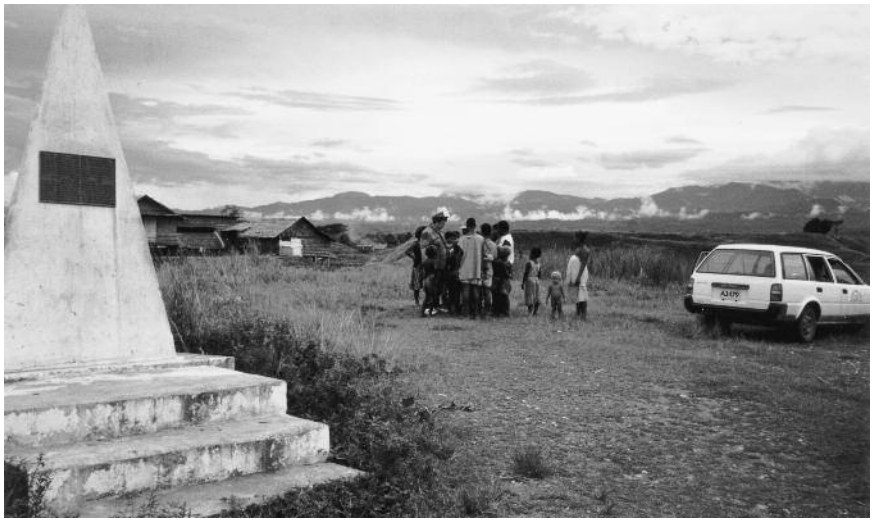
We walked down the front of the ridge where the remaining stakes and wire were and I got a few pieces as souvenirs. At this point one of the kids came along and offered six single US. 30-calibre rounds and two full Garand rifle clips. The clips were very rotted, but I got the single rounds from him (after pulling the bullets and emptying the powder).

The Japanese memorial looked a bit overgrown which was unusual as the Japanese Embassy pays the villagers to keep it neat. Milay said they gave them a lawn-mower for that purpose — looks like it had not been used for a while. We didn't get across to the October 1942 battle area, intending to come back later in the week. If I had known how much rain would fall later, I would have gone there then.

Walking back to mid-ridge we veered off the path into the grass to the left. This area would have been full of Japanese firing across to the final defensive knoll, so I hoped to find a few cartridge cases. We looked around, but the grass was so thick all I came across was a single Springfield rifle ammo clip. There must be a lot of stuff just under the surface, but you would really have to burn off the grass and go digging — it was damn hot in there too. Walking back down the path we found one US bullet.

The grass was thick in front of the final defensive knoll but I wanted to find the line of barbed-wire stakes and wire I saw there in 1996 (they had burnt off the grass that year).

The crashed Mitsubishi G4M Betty bomber in the jungle south of Edson's Ridge, pictured by Peter in 1995 and since smuggled away by souvenir hunters.



Peter's friend Rod Bellars bartering for relics with the local kids on Edson's Ridge.

We walked down to the area where 200 Japanese had fallen. After a few minutes we found the stakes, ending in a full roll of wire still sitting in the dirt 57 years on like it was frozen there. Twenty feet further down the slope we found the live US grenade in 1996. I got a few pieces of wire as souvenirs.

It was very hot in the high grass here. Climbing back on top of the ridge, I had a last look at the memorial and took a few photos of the area that Company C of the Marine Raiders defended.

We drove back down to Henderson and had a couple of Cokes at the old terminal building, and I took photos of the memorial pillars and Japanese 75mm AA gun out the front. Once again a lot of grass around the memorials that needed to be cut back. Of all the US memorials I saw (apart from the one on Skyline Ridge), these and their metal plaques stand the test of time best. Now that the new International Terminal is open, it is a pity that tourists no longer see these as they arrive on Guadalcanal.

Relics for sale on Edson's Ridge during Peter's 1999 visit. The Japanese mess tin was marked to 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment.

SEMPER FIDELIS
DEDICATED
TO THOSE MEN OF THE
FIRST MARINE DIVISION F.M.F
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
IN THE SERVICE OF
THEIR COUNTRY
GUADALCANAL

Forgotten US memorial pillar on the west bank of the Ilu river.

Japanese monument on the east bank.

Driving east we came down to the track to the Ilu river (Alligator Creek), scene of the sandbar battle of August 21, 1942. Last year we were told that this area too had been sold to some Korean and European businessmen for development. There was now a gate across the track, so we couldn't drive down. Leaving the taxi we walked towards the beach. The track was pretty overgrown and obviously had not been used by a vehicle since last year. To the right of the trail, just along the river's west bank, is a large area where they seem to have buried all the aircraft bits and pieces. There are metal remains everywhere: mountings for radial engines, pieces of wing, undercarriage parts, propellers, etc. In 1995 we found some US pilot armour from the back of the cockpit and gave it to the museum. Very sweaty and full of mosquitos here. Unfortunately all this stuff is buried where the American positions would have been in August 1942. To the left of the trail, other relics can be found in the former 1943-45 living area. I saw no sign of development.

On the west bank (American side) near the beach is a white American memorial pillar. I am told this marks the machine-gun position where Marine Al Schmid won the Navy Cross. The memorial was as I remembered it from last year — obscured by seven foot high grass, dirty and with the plaque ripped off. Pretty sad I thought.

On the east bank (Japanese side) stands a Japanese marble memorial to the soldiers of the Ichiki Force. In 1996 we found a single US barbed-wire stake lying on the beach here, totally encrusted. When we tried to chip the coral off the stake it broke in half — totally rusted through and carbonised. But still stuck to the side of it was a partially burnt 37mm shell propellant charge from a round fired by a Marine anti-tank gun or Stuart light tank so long ago — a frozen moment — my first and favourite Guadalcanal souvenir!

The beach had beer cans and other rubbish scattered about. This could be a great tourist site with a bit of clean-up work. Apart from most of the wartime palm trees gone (which is a shame for comparison photos) the terrain is virtually untouched. I took some photos and video and we walked back up the track to the car. Eagle-eyed Milay spotted a fired US. 30-calibre cartridge case and the bullet from a Japanese Nambu pistol cartridge about 50 feet up the track. This was my fourth visit to the site, but the first time we had found any evidence of the battle (not counting all the post-battle stuff dumped here). I called it a day and went back to the hotel.

Saturday, January 16, 1999

I met Timothy at 9 a.m. and we drove out to Henderson to see Alistair Melaqy at Security about taking some photos out on the airfield. Prior to my trip, I had written to the Airport Manager and obtained permission to match up half a dozen 1942 photos I had found in various books. It turned out Alistair was not working today, so we decided to come back on Monday.

We drove east again to Red Beach to the memorial marking the spot where the 5th and 1st Marine Regiments landed on August 7, 1942. On the way to the beach we crossed the Tenaru over a small US Bailey bridge (I thought of the 'Amtrac bridge' constructed here on the morning of the landing). The memorial pillar was dirty and the plaque half smashed. Wait a moment - did I say 'plaque'? The wording was simply typed on a piece of paper and inserted between two perspex pieces. Half of it was now water-damaged and unreadable. Surely a better plaque than this could be put on it? It looked really cheap. On the other hand it might have been a quick replacement for a plaque that had been stolen? I walked down to the beach and took some photos. A few hundred yards to the west I could see the two Japanese 75mm AA guns I had inspected on my first trip in 1995. Then you could drive right down to the beach near them, but the last few years have seen more houses and fences go up along here although you can still access the beach at two or three points. These guns, now totally rusted and with the barrel of one missing, apparently were part of a four-gun battery that was captured by the marines.

Above: **The US memorial on Red Beach, of identical design as the one on the Ilu.** *Below:* **One of the two Japanese Type 95 anti-aircraft guns remaining on Red Beach today.**

Above and below left: **Though now very decayed, the 30-odd US Amtracs left in a field near Tetere remain an incredible sight.**

Plaque-less US memorial on the beach at Gavaga Creek.

Continuing east another five miles to the village of Tetere I had another look at the dump of 30 Amtracs near it about 100 yards from the beach. After 50 plus years in the open the armour is rusted wafer-thin now on most and they are a sorry sight. They must use an old photo for the tourist brochures! Some are not too bad while others have large trees growing around and through them.

The villagers said they had no relics, which I found hard to believe with the Gavaga Creek battlefield just 200 yards away (I guess they had not heard that crazy white men actually pay money for this 'junk'). Gavaga Creek is where the 7th Marines and the Army's 164th Infantry encircled and killed 450 Japanese troops in early November 1942. I walked down to the beach to photograph the US memorial pillar at the mouth of the creek. Yes, you guessed it — in seven foot of grass, dirty and the plaque missing (as in 1998). This memorial sits on a concrete base with a circle of stones, but you can barely see them through the grass. Another spot to wield a machete regularly!

We drove back to Henderson, stopping at the old control tower. Oh boy, grass and weeds were growing wild here. We had to hack our way through eight-foot growth just to get to the foot of the steps! The Seabees Memorial was engulfed, the Edson's Ridge Memorial was surrounded by grass, very grimy looking and some of the local kids had sprayed a bit of graffiti on it. The air raid shelter was likewise overgrown. There sure must have been a lot of rain recently, as when I went to look inside I found there was about four feet of brown water in it, with empty beer cans glinting on the floor.

We climbed to the top of the tower and found more graffiti sprayed on the wooden railings. In 1998 the west-facing rail was missing; now in 1999 the northern rail was gone as well. It certainly needs some new wood and a touch of paint. I took photos of Edson's Ridge, Fighter Strip No. 1 and Pagoda Hill and then we returned to the hotel, as cloud was massing over Mount Austen and rain starting to fall. I had another swim in the pool and arranged to meet Timothy again at 2 p.m., by which time the rain had stopped. We decided to take the coastal road to the west.

As you drive west out of Honiara, you pass the Rove Police Barracks along Mendana Avenue. Here there is a monument to Sergeant Major Jacob Vouza, the famous Solomons scout.

A few miles on along the coastal road, at Lela beach near Kokumbona, are the remains of an American floating crane on the shore and two Japanese 75mm field guns, found by the villagers in a scrap dump and set up on the beach. Both look like they have had charges put down the barrels to wreck them. The bay here was a Japanese supply landing point. Company I of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, landed near here on August 19, 1942, in one of the first marine offensive actions. Across the road behind the

Left: **Jacob Vouza memorial in Honiara.**
Below: **Japanese 75mm guns set up at Lela beach.**

Japanese memorial facing the beach near Kokumbona.

village is a Japanese memorial and behind that the remains of a Japanese tracked gun tractor that towed one of the 150mm guns used to shell Henderson Field. In 1995, one of the Japanese gunners returned and showed the villagers where the tractor had been buried during the retreat. The gun this tractor towed is the one now on display at the National Museum.

About a mile further on, on the west bank of the Poha river, near a pig farm down the road on the left, lie six more Japanese gun tractors, probably abandoned here for lack of fuel. They too look like they have been disabled with grenades.

We continued west to the Bonegi river mouth near where are the remains of the transport ship *Kinugawa Maru*. This is one of the 11 Japanese transports beached and sunk by US planes, coastal artillery at Lunga Point and the destroyer *Meade* from Tulagi on November 15, 1942. There is little visible above the waterline now after scrap merchants and storms have done their job (an earthquake in 1977 collapsed the entire bridge area). This ship is a favourite with scuba divers because of the easy accessibility from Honiara. The bow is only about 10-15 feet from the shore, while the stern rests in 100 feet of water. There were a few cars on the beach having a picnic and some kids swimming near the ship.

While we were there another taxi arrived bearing two young Japanese tourists. I had never seen any Japanese at any sites before apart from one guy at Skyline Ridge in 1998. They walked down towards the ship and one of them went in for a swim but it must have been a bit cold so he did not stay in very long. I had a few pages of photos of the ship in 1942, so I gave these to them and had a chat. They did not seem to really know much about the war and looked at me blankly when I told them I was interested in collecting relics. All they seemed to know about Guadalcanal was that 'lot of Americans die here'. When I heard that, I 'educated' them on the extent of Japanese losses. I don't think they had heard that before! They really don't teach them much history at school, but at least they were interested enough to make the trip. The local guys on the beach liked the photos and were very interested though.

Leaving the taxi parked on the beach, we walked across the road and along a track about 600 yards south-east of the road to the one remaining Sherman tank on the island (*Jezebel*). Seven-foot-high grass all around and hot as hell! The basic hull looked good and would restore well — nothing much left inside though. It is a late model one, circa 1944, and where it sits used to be a firing range.

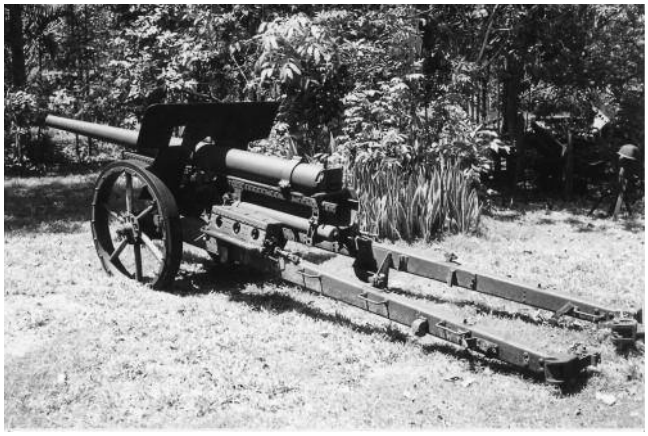
The Japanese gun tractor that towed one of the 'Pistol Pete' howitzers. Buried in 1945, recovered in 1995, and now rusting away at Kokumbona.

I was told that over the next hill was an extensive US rubbish dump. Wartime photos I had seen showed US tents and huts down at the beach, so a junk heap was to be expected. We hacked our way up a hill south of the tank, got to the top and looked around, but couldn't see anything in the growth. A very good view towards Kokumbona though. We were getting pretty sweaty so we made our way back to the beach. One of the villagers confirmed the junk pile was there but told us we had walked up the wrong hill — we should have gone east of the tank! We didn't particularly feel like trekking back again so we arranged to meet him here on Tuesday morning and he would show it all to us.

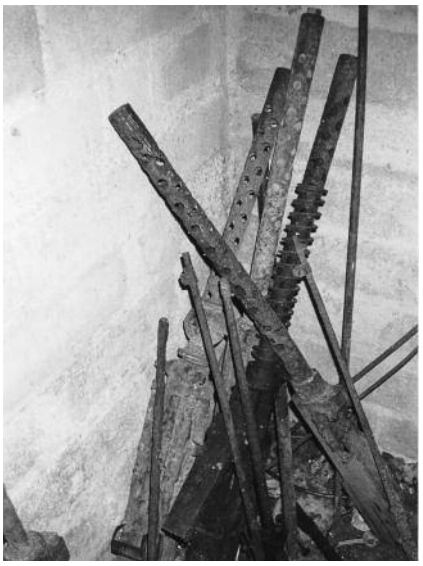
A few miles further along the coastal road, at Doma beach near Bunina Point, lies the wreckage of another Japanese transport ship, the *Kyusyu Maru*. One of three Japanese transports destroyed by US aircraft on October 15, 1942, it was beached here and sunk after a dive-bomber hit ammunition in the rear hold. In the 1960s scrap dealers blew up the bow section that was above the water and a pile of plating still remains on the beach. Two other transports lie nearby in 200 feet of water.

Other Japanese tractors left behind near the Poha river.

***Jezebel,* the Sherman dumped near the Bonegi river.**

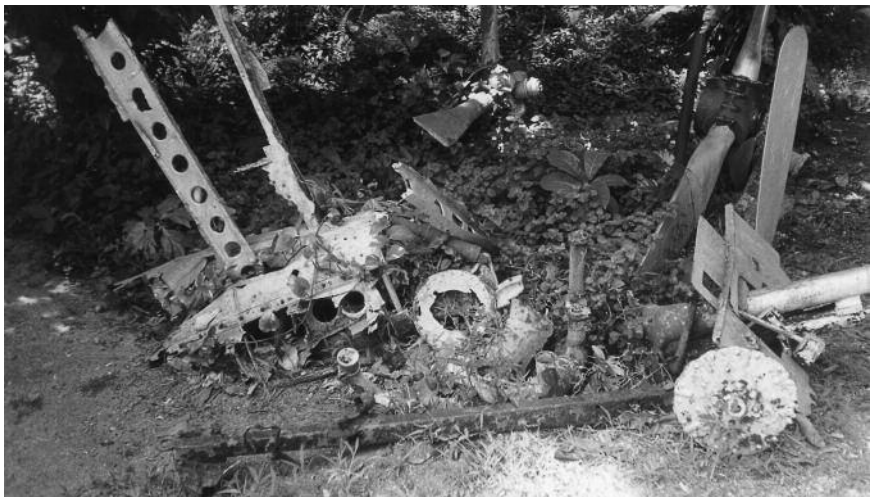


Left: **One of the Japanese 105mm guns that shelled Henderson Field, preserved at Fred Kona's War Museum at Vilu.** *Right:* **The Japanese tank turret at Vilu is said to be from one of the nine tanks knocked out on the Matanikau sandbar on October 23, 1942. On the right a Japanese 75mm anti-aircraft gun and at the rear a 150mm howitzer.**



More relics at Vilu. *Above:* **SBD Dauntless dive-bomber.** *Right:* **Machine guns kept in safe store to prevent them from being stolen by Bougainvillian revolutionaries.**

Another four miles on, at Vilu village, is Fred Kona's War Museum. Kona, who pulled items large and small out of the jungle, started this display in the early 1970s. He is dead now and his widow and brother run the place. Sadly, over 50 years exposure in the open air has taken its toll on some items, and aircraft markings are barely readable. The Grumman Wildcat recovered in 1973 is still there. They have had at least three offers from American enthusiasts to buy it but have said no. The 20mm and 7.7mm holes from the attacking Zero fighter are plainly visible. The Japanese artillery pieces on display here comprise three 150mm guns (from the Cape Esperance area, where they overlooked the channel to Savo Island), one 105mm gun, two 37mm anti-tank guns, two 70mm guns, a 75mm anti-aircraft gun and two 75mm guns on fixed mountings (probably salvaged from the beached Japanese transport ships). At least one of the heavy pieces here was used to shell Henderson Field. Other items include a Dauntless dive-bomber, a P-38 fighter (crashed near Lunga Point in 1943), a Corsair with a one machine gun still in its left wing (and a faint '16' on the fuselage), a Japanese Betty bomber wing and nose, a Val dive-bomber tail, a Japanese medium tank turret (reputed to originate from one of the tanks knocked out on the Matanikau sandbar) and assorted mess tins, helmets, water bottles, etc. Once again, any good machine guns are stashed away, as the Bougainvillians stole all the ones they did have out.

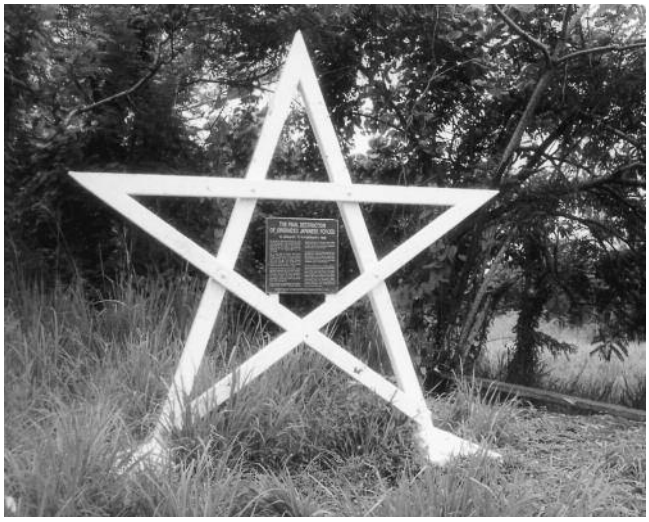


Assorted relics at the Tambea beach resort.

Tambea is about 10 minutes further west up the road from Vilu, on the shores of Kamimbo Bay, the Japanese evacuation point in 1943. Here, the remains of a Zero lie by the roadside, well and truly stripped. It was found intact in the bay in the 1970s but an ownership dispute led to its demise. Across the road facing the beach is the Tambea Beach Resort. Near their pool they have a few items: a Japanese war memorial to the 2nd Sendai Division and stuck in the ground nearby some propellers and tail fin pieces of either the same Zero or a Val dive-bomber. Next to that are the remains of a Japanese 70mm gun, slowly rotting away, that they dragged out of the water in front of the resort some years ago.

We drove back along the coast road and I took a few snaps of Kokumbona beach (after crossing a US Bailey bridge over the Kokumbona river). Reputedly, the rusted barrel and the toppled mount of a Japanese 75mm AA gun lie in the surf at this beach. Nothing in the way of relics to show for the day, just photos and a lot of sweat, but any time outdoors without rain was a bonus.

The Japanese memorial on Hill 27 at the Gifu battlefield. Note the bowl for cremating human bones.



The US memorial near Hill 31, on the other side of the Gifu position. Its plaque gives an explanation of the battle.

Sunday, January 17, 1999

I met Timothy and Milay at 9 a.m. Light rain began to fall as we drove up Wright Road towards Mount Austen and the 'Gifu' position. This is an interesting area. The 'Grassy Knoll' position on the top of Mount Austen was used by Japanese artillery observers to direct their 150mm artillery fire onto Henderson Field and the view across the whole Marine perimeter is very good. Nearby are overgrown slit trenches.

A drive downhill leads to the site of the Japanese Gifu strong point that saw a lot of fighting in December 1942-January 1943 as elements of five US Army battalions wiped out 500 Japanese defenders. A village now covers part of the battlefield. It is a short walk to the Japanese memorial on top of Hill 27. In 1984, the Japanese recovered lots of bones at the foot of the hill, in the area of their counter-attacks. They still periodically search for remains and cremate any bones found in a bowl at the memorial.

On the crest of the hill stands a white painted cross marked 'Toshio Kojima, 2nd Lt, 228th Infantry, KIA Jan 1943' (when we first came here in 1996 the grave was only marked by a rough wooden cross with no name on it). The first night the Americans pulled back to the reverse slope and the Japanese reached the top here, but were forced back by US artillery fire. The whole hill is still covered in shrapnel fragments. There are a lot of overgrown foxholes on the slopes, and all kinds of relics can be found strewn amongst them.

When we here in 1996 the locals had just found the barrel and wheels from the Japanese 70mm gun captured by the Americans on the hill. During the American surprise attack the Japanese crew had been caught resting under trees 30 yards from the gun and been cut down as they ran to man it. The Americans used the gun against the Japanese until the ammunition supply ran out, then took the gun apart and buried it in foxholes.

Down into the Gifu ravines and near Hill 31 is the site of the mass grave of the last 85 Japanese defenders killed during the final break-out attempt (their bones were also recovered in 1984). In 1996, I found a US water bottle near here that was marked 'M. Romero' with a serial number. I wrote to the US Army Records Department. Most of his file was lost and all they could tell me was that he enlisted in October 1941 and was discharged in September 1943 so he survived Guadalcanal at least.

This time, our visit to the Gifu was not so successful. As we got further up Mount Austen the rain got heavier. There was a lot of mud and water on the 500-yard track to the village but we negotiated it without getting bogged. When we arrived in the village most people were in church (bad timing) and the rain was heavier. We sheltered under the porch of a hut.

I dashed out and had a quick look under the village tree where the relics usually sit. The Zero drop tank and Betty bomber wing I first saw in 1995 were still there, the wing still deteriorating and losing a lot more paint. All the grass from last year under the tree was gone and no relics around the base any more. The nearby table only had some rotted helmets, a burst US 81mm mortar shell, a US 75mm shell, crushed Japanese mess tins and gas mask filters, rusted metalwork of an Arisaka rifle, two live Japanese grenades (one with knee-mortar propellant charge attached) and a live knee-mortar round. The only good item was a nice US canteen cup. It looked like all the other items that were there last year had been cleaned out by somebody.

Dashing back to cover I talked to Peter, the hut owner, whom I knew from previous visits. He owned the items on the table, so I got the canteen cup. The only other item he had in his hut was a single US Army button. It was raining too heavily to walk up to Hill 27 and nobody was about, so we left and, of course, as we drove back down Wright Road the rain eased. There was a small memorial plaque by the roadside near Hill 35 — in good condition!

Private memorial to Japanese 2nd Lieutenant Toshio Kojima on Hill 27.

Below: **Site of the mass grave of 85 Japanese defenders of the Gifu who fell in a last, desperate break-out attempt by 100 men on the night of January 22/23, 1943. Among the dead were Major Takeyoshi Inagaki, the strong point commander (and CO of the 2nd Battalion, 228th Infantry), Major Nishihata (CO of the 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry), eight captains and 15 lieutenants. Cleared by the Japanese in 1984, the grave spot is now marked by a memorial.**

It had stopped raining now, so we crossed the Matanikau and drove up to the large US memorial on Skyline Ridge overlooking the river. Dedicated in 1992, it gives details of the entire campaign. It is very impressive and the view across the coast and Ironbottom Sound excellent. From here you can also see the 'Galloping Horse' hills position and Hill 27 at the Gifu.

I must say there was a big difference to the year before. In 1998 there were weeds about, the writing on the marble slabs showed weathering and was hard to read and the brass map plaque was showing the effects of six years in the sun, with rain and salt air eating into it. Lawrence had told me on Friday that the US Government now gives a monthly amount of $1,000 for the upkeep of the site, which is split between the two nearby village communities. I was very pleased to see that the brass plaque had been reconditioned (sent to New Zealand I was told) and looked almost brand new. Fresh paint had been applied to the lettering on the slabs and it really stood out now. Also no weeds in sight — altogether a very good change!

From here we drove down across the Matanikau again and down the east bank for a couple of kilometres, past Hill 49 to a position roughly opposite Hill 54. On the west Bank is Tuvaruhu village. My friend Stan had been here in October 1998 and met Michael Ben and Patrick who are tour guides and very knowledgeable about the 'Seahorse' and 'Galloping Horse' hills battle areas. The river here is only about one foot deep, so Milay waded across, but was told they were both out and would be back later. We said we would return at 3 p.m.

It was now about midday so I went back to the hotel and arranged to meet as usual at 2 p.m. Back in the hotel I started to clean the canteen cup and discovered it must have belonged to a marine. Gifu was an Army battle and the only Marine participation I had read of was some attached Marine artillery observers on Hill 27. (They amused themselves by firing the captured Jap 70mm gun.)

The canteen cup is in pretty good condition and the handle still folds. As I scrubbed I noticed on the bottom 'US 1918' and what looked like a name 'S aety' faintly scratched there. On one side of the cup was clearly scratched 'Parris Island' and underneath that 'New River NC'. After cleaning the cup I went for a swim.

At 2 p.m. we drove back to Gifu. There was no rain now and the track was still driveable. There was a soccer game going on and most of the village population was watching that. As we looked at the relics near the tree a guy came over and informed us that the village council wanted to improve the church and so had decreed that 'from now on' anyone wanting to climb Hill 27 would have to pay a fee of S$50 (US$12)! This took me by surprise and Timothy as well. We were undecided if he was serious or just trying to pull a fast one. I briefly thought of telling him where he could shove his $50 but thought better of it. I had not come all this way to walk away. I merely told him what a good idea that was to drive any tourists away and that we would pay when we came down from the hill.

The main US memorial stands on Skyline Ridge, overlooking the Matanikau river.

Lots of grass everywhere. Looked like there had been a general clean-up of relics. I know that a couple of years ago the villagers excavated a lot of the foxholes and probably found most of what there was then. There used to be a pile of shrapnel and Garand clips near the Japanese memorial, but now there was nothing. We walked across the hill looking in overgrown foxholes, but all we saw were totally rusted-through and rotted C-ration tins. All I found was a couple of pieces of shrapnel and one bottom to a Carlisle bandage packet in reasonable condition with 60 per cent green paint still on it.

Walking down the rear slope the grass was even thicker and you had to be careful not to fall into a foxhole. All I came up with here was one fragment of a US hand grenade and a couple of grenade handles.

The slopes down towards the Matanikau are the place to look — a lot of stuff still down there, but with all the rain it was too slippery at the moment. As we returned to the village, the soccer game was still in progress and most people were more interested in that than bringing relics out of huts. It would have been different with no game on.

I did get talking to one villager and he went to his hut and emerged a few minutes later with a rice bag full of stuff. I ended up getting a pull-through from a Japanese rifle cleaning kit, two Arisaka ammo clips, five Jap cartridges, three US .45-calibre rounds and the top of a Carlisle bandage tin (this was the WW2 version — the previous one I had found on Hill 27 last year was dated August 1918 — with the paper still on the back of the lid).

The guy who demanded the $50 fee was nowhere to be found, but another villager confirmed what he had said. This guy was friendlier and after talking to him I was convinced (well, half convinced) it was for the church — although still a rip-off. We paid, but if the priest from the morning service had still been there I would have handed it to him personally. As we drove off down the track, a teenager waved us over and offered me a live US grenade and 60mm mortar shell — sorry mate, but I can't buy those!

A little further down the track another villager stopped us. He had a Japanese Nambu light MG magazine and two BAR magazines. Unfortunately they had been buried a long time and were very rotted. I had seen about a dozen BAR magazines excavated from a foxhole in 1996 on Hill 27 and regret not picking one up then. As I was about to say 'thanks, but no thanks' and leave, he produced a Japanese Type 91 hand grenade. The others on the village table had been live, but this one was minus fuse and explosive and was a good example so I got it.

It was now 3.30 p.m., so we returned to the Matanikau to see Michael Ben. He was back and waded across the river and we had a chat. He agreed to take me for a hike across the 'Galloping Horse' battlefield at 9 a.m. on Monday.

Then it was back to the hotel for a swim and dinner and then a cleaning session on the relics in the bathroom. The writing on the Carlisle bandage packet top came up very well when the dirt was scrubbed off.

Relics at the Gifu village: a Betty bomber wing and engine controls, and a drop tank from a Zero fighter.

Inspecting US and Japanese relics at the Gifu: a 150mm shell, mess cup, gas mask filters, MG magazines, water bottles.

Sims Ridge — part of the 'Galloping Horse' position — owes its fame to an action which occurred there with the 27th Infantry on January 12-13, 1943. When the 2nd Battalion encountered a Japanese machine-gun nest, the battalion executive, Captain Charles W. Davis, and two junior officers crawled up to locate it. Exposing himself, 1st Lieutenant Weldon S. Sims was killed, but Davis crawled behind a shelf close to the enemy emplacement and called in artillery and mortar barrages on the enemy, staying in his exposed position throughout the night. Next day, with the attack still stalled, Davis volunteered to lead four men back to the strong point and neutralise it. Crawling on their belly, the five men got to within ten yards of the emplacement. After an exchange of grenades, Davis leapt to his feet, but his rifle jammed after one shot. Drawing his pistol, he fired at the enemy, waving the others on. The five men leapt into the strong point and finished the Japanese with rifles and pistols. This bold act took place in full view of the battalion and electrified Company E into action. Surging uphill, they took the ridge, carrying on to take the final crest, Hill 53. His bravery won Davis the Medal of Honor. Immortalised in James Jones' autobiographical novel *The Thin Red Line* (1962), Davis' action recently saw a dramatic recreation in Terrence Malick's acclaimed war movie of the same title produced in 1998 (a much better film than the first 1962 Hollywood adaption). Peter took his photo looking from Sims Ridge west towards Hill 53.

Monday, January 18, 1999

Light rain was falling when I met Milay and we drove down to the Matanikau. Wading the river we talked to Michael and Patrick, who had guided Stan up to the 'Seahorse' hill in October 1998. The rain had stopped by 9.30 a.m. and we set off uphill towards Hills 55 and 52 along the original American trail. Michael pointed out a few other US trails too and I could start to get an idea of the area from aerial photos. It had rained during the night so just keeping my footing on the trail was a full-time job. We stopped near Hill 52 for a breather and Michael pointed out the various features, including Hills 43, 44, 31, 42 and 27. Over this area the US 27th Infantry fought in January 1943.

There is a great view down the valley towards Ironbottom Sound and Kukum/Lunga. Michael had a Japanese map of the battle area. A while ago some Japanese students doing a project on Guadalcanal came over and he took them around. They walked the Murayama Trail and wrote a book about it. They sent him a copy, but of course it is all in Japanese.

We walked past Hill 52 and Exton Ridge and up the northern slopes of Sims Ridge (of *Thin Red Line* fame), where the Japanese fire held up the 27th Infantry. From here there was a good view across to Exton Ridge, Hills 53, 57, 55 and 66. There were huts on the top of Hill 55 and some on Hill 52 and Sims Ridge. They were building on top of Hill 66 and it was being levelled off a bit.

From the aerial photos I had imagined the battlefield covered a larger area and I was amazed how small it looked on the ground. The path up the ridge was pretty slippery. When we got to the huts the first two things I saw were a US pack strap clip lying in the dirt. A good-condition Japanese helmet was lying near the hut — no holes, the star still attached and even a bit of original green paint inside the bowl. The owner said he had found it in a Jap position on the ridge. Michael said it was one of the best he had seen — it was certainly the best I had seen in four trips too. Pointing towards the jungle south of Hill 53 he said there were a lot of Jap helmets there, but most were rotted.

The local villagers are all very keen to see *The Thin Red Line*, the 1998 movie based on James Jones' autobiographical novel of the same title, as a lot of them had been hired as extras. They were amazed that most of the filming was done in Australia and not on the actual battlefield, but it was too difficult to move equipment as there is only walking track access and no vehicle road to bring up cameras, etc. Sims Ridge is the 'real' ridge that is fictionally portrayed in the film. The movie ridge bears some little resemblance to the real battle area. The father of the guy I was talking to had worked for the Americans at Lunga Point during the war and was given a US flag by them.

Looking down from Sims Ridge there is now a small village in the valley between it and Hill 53. We walked down the trail to the northern end of Sims, past numerous overgrown foxholes. Michael pointed out the ledge that Captain Charles Davis and his assault party of the 27th Infantry crawled along before they threw grenades, stormed the position and killed 17 Japanese defenders. We even found a hand grenade ring still on the ledge.

Near a large Japanese foxhole (MG bunker position?) on the crest I picked up a couple of pieces of shrapnel and a shell or mortar-bomb fuse. Pointing across to a large tree on Hill 53 Michael said a Jap 70mm artillery piece had been thrown down the hillside there.

We made our way down the reverse slope to the village, where they had a very nice condition Japanese 37mm anti-tank gun under one of the huts. This gun had also been on Hill 53, but had been left intact there. Last year the villagers heard that an unnamed Australian expatriate was on the verge of removing (stealing) it, so ten of them manhandled it down the hillside to the village. It was minus the wheels and the trail arms, but apart from that 95 per cent complete with no really heavy rust and the shield still intact. It would restore very well. The only other item I saw in the village was the rusty metalwork of a Japanese Arisaka rifle that one guy showed us. Michael said that there was still plenty of stuff scattered about in the jungle, including at least one Japanese machine gun in the Hill 57 area.

We walked back up to the huts on Sims and had another chat to the owner. He produced a US helmet shell, which he said he had found on the east slope of Sims. There is a two-inch square rust-hole where the rain has collected in it but apart from that it is a good example of a first-pattern M1 helmet. A friend of his then pulled out a full Garand clip which only had light surface rust. He had carefully pulled the bullets and disposed of the powder — again the best clip I had seen.

Black storm clouds were gathering, so we did not continue on to Hill 53 but decided we had better start back. It had taken us about 90 minutes to walk from the Matanikau river to Sims Ridge so we all knew we were going to get soaked coming back. What the hell — as long as the video camera stayed dry!

We were just passing between Exton Ridge and Hill 52 when the heavens opened and the view towards Lunga was lost behind mist and cloud. Within a few minutes we were drenched and it was slosh, slosh, slosh, with the wet socks in the wet boots. I could not help but think of reading that after Hill 53 was taken 'a sudden cloud-burst cooled the troops'. I understand now what I had read in the histories about lack of water. I got through two canteens, but brought more in my pack, and this was in overcast weather with no blazing sun! Milay kindly carried the pack for me. I think if I had been carrying that on the way down with the extra water, the helmets, etc, I would have fallen over a few more times for sure.

The path became a stream and it required full concentration to keep my footing. As it got steeper, grasping clumps of grass was the only way to stay upright. Michael and Milay were both barefoot, and I remembered again reading how Carlson's Raiders were amazed at how agile the natives were with bare feet while they slipped and slid! How true it is — soft white fella feet need good boots! The last 50 feet were the most treacherous, but I made it without falling.

Back at the village I took off my jacket, socks and boots. Michael showed me the collection he had recently started of items he has brought down from 'Seahorse' and 'Galloping Horse'. The hut was pretty dark, so I could not take video, only flash photos. He had an impressive selection: mess tins, water bottles, helmets, cutlery, ammunition, shells, ammo tins, Jap gas mask tins, US 75mm shell container lids — even the spring out of one of the Japanese 75mm guns on the 'Seahorse' (not 70mm as described in the histories). There are parts of at least two guns up there, plus some ammunition tins. I resolved to come back and see him during the week, have a better look at his collection and with any luck get Patrick to take me up to have a look at 'Seahorse'.

Michael said that some people wanted to sell the 'Seahorse' area for development, but the government has bought up all the land and put a freeze on development. Likewise the housing development at Edson's Ridge we were told about last year was not allowed to go ahead (good). A committee has been formed to preserve the battle sites. Lawrence is chairman and Michael is one of the members.

He mentioned to me that the Mendana Hotel gift shop was selling copies of Don Richter's book about Jacob Vouza *When the Sun Stood Still*. I have been looking for a copy of that for a while so that was good to know.

We waded the river (a bit higher now after the rain) and I almost fell on the slippery rocks with the video camera, but Milay steadied me. Back to the hotel. I must have looked a sight walking dripping and barefoot across the foyer carrying my stuff and boots. The security guard laughed when I said 'just a little wet in the hills'.

The next hour was spent rinsing and attempting to dry my jacket, trousers, socks, boots, pack, etc. I then sat in the shower for 20 minutes scrubbing the helmets and other items. Afterwards I walked down to the museum and saw Lawrence and went down to the Mendana to buy the book. Back to the hotel for dinner and a read.

Tuesday, January 19, 1999

Heavy rain was coming down between 2.30 and 5.30 a.m. Cyclone Danni was heading towards New Caledonia and Fiji and we were getting these storms. I hoped the forecast for the next few days would be better.

I met Milay at 9 a.m. (Timothy was working) and we drove down to the Bonegi river. When we got there nobody was about — our 'guide' was nowhere to be seen. The rain was getting heavier, so we decided there was no point in wasting time here. We drove back east out to Henderson to see Alistair about taking the airfield photos. We found him at the old domestic terminal. I had not seen him since 1996 and it was good to meet him again. I showed him the letter of permission from the Airport Manager and he said no problem. However the rain was coming down steadily by now (the car park was 75 per cent flooded) so I arranged to come back and see him again at 2 p.m.

Back at the hotel, I wrote out a list of the items I had found so far and delivered it to Lawrence to obtain an export permit. Then I walked down to the Solomons Airlines office and confirmed my flights home. Light rain and drizzle continued to fall.

At 2 p.m. we returned to the airport. While they were finding Alistair I showed my 1942 comparison photos to some of the other airport staff and had a good chat. Alistair checked with the air traffic people and they said a plane was due in 30 minutes. This was not enough time to properly take the photos but we walked out onto the tarmac anyway and I got my bearings as to where they were taken. Light rain started to fall again and the low cloud obscured Mount Austen and the hills. The rain got heavier, so we vacated the tarmac. The forecast for Wednesday/Thursday was for the rain to clear, so we arranged that I come back at 1 p.m. on Wednesday when the airfield would be clear of planes and I could take the photos.

As we drove in the rain back past the old control tower, Milay pointed out to me roughly where the tunnel entrance was. He said he knew it well, as he used to play in there when he was a kid. That was good to hear — I would not have to waste time searching for it. I have been corresponding with Aubrey Buser in the States, who was a marine who served in Signals at the Pagoda and in the tunnels. I was looking forward to taking some photos for him. Back to the hotel for a swim and dinner.

There are two Japanese 150mm guns preserved at Honiara. This is the one at the tennis club. (David Green)

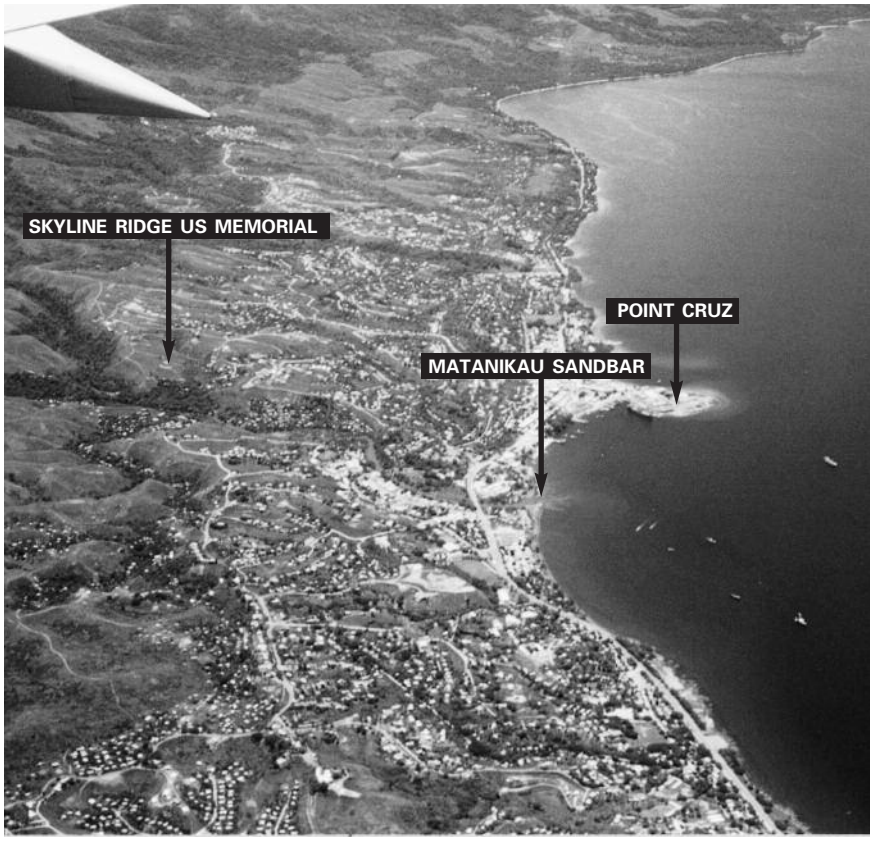
Wednesday, January 20, 1999

More heavy rain during the night (curses!). I was not meeting Milay until 1 p.m. today, so after breakfast I walked to the Guadalcanal tennis club to photograph the Japanese 150mm gun they have, returning via the National Museum to take a photo of their 37mm anti-tank gun. I returned to the pool for a while and read more of Don Richter's book. The sun was out now and I was hoping the rain would hold off.

At 1 p.m. we returned to Henderson. I met Alan, who confirmed no planes were due and then Rex, who accompanied me out onto the airfield. We walked down past the old tower and the now unused portion of the runway towards the area where the Japanese hangars used to be. I took comparison shots of the photos I had and video. I could have spent all day poking about out there but of course that was not possible. It was hot out on the tarmac and very dark clouds were looming in the north. I thought I had better get over to the tunnel before it poured again.

The other one is next to the National Museum. Known collectively as 'Pistol Pete', the long-range Type 96 150mm howitzers, which had a maximum range of 12,971 yards, were used to shell Henderson Field, out of range of US counter-fire.

A marvellous aerial photo taken by Peter in 1995 showing how Honiara, the post-war new town and capital of the Solomons, today sprawls across much of the 1942-43 battlefield.



We drove across and parked on an old concrete hut foundation just as the first drops fell. Milay plunged through some bushes to the side of the hill. Green vines covered the entire slope but half a dozen blows with the machete uncovered the tunnel entrance and we clambered in as the rain really came down. I would never have found this by myself — it was so well hidden by the vines. When I saw where it was I cursed myself — when I was up here last year I must have walked within six feet of it without knowing!

The tunnel looked in pretty good condition and was dry. Being hidden by the vines meant that the local boys had not left piles of empty beer cans everywhere, like at the control tower bunker. My flashlight was not very powerful so it was difficult to take any video. I took flash photos and so got glimpses of what was ahead. There had been a few small roof cave-ins leaving piles of dirt three to four feet high, but it was still passable. As we got 20-30 feet in, the bats came flying past us and I cursed my weak light. Not really good for exploration, but I didn't really care because the most important thing is that I know where it is now, so next time I will come prepared and in the dry season. If this was cleaned up and a track put in, it would be great for tourists.

I was determined to take some shots on top of Pagoda Hill, rain or no rain. We dashed back to the taxi during a brief lull in the rain and I dumped the video there and went up the hill with my waterproof 35mm camera. Milay was smart — he stayed in the car!

There were six-foot-high grass and bushes everywhere and of course by the time I got to the top I was soaked. I had photocopies of four photos of the Pagoda to do comparison shots of but they were now just wet mush in my pocket. I took a few photos but it was hard to keep the water out of the lens. The trees and mist obscured the view towards Henderson and the old control tower.

In 1998 I had assumed that the white pillar on the hill was another US memorial marker with the plaque ripped off but I think I am wrong. On closer inspection it is more likely one of the metal ventilation shafts for the tunnel below (the top has been sealed). So there is really no memorial on Pagoda Hill to mark its historic significance — a pity.

Cursing the weather I sloshed back down to the car (but remembered that this was nothing compared to what the troops put up with) and we went back to the hotel for another drying session. Tomorrow would be the last chance to see Michael Ben and go searching for a few more relics before I had to pack up. The plane to Brisbane was leaving at 2.15 a.m. on Friday morning.

Thursday, January 21, 1999

The rain started again at 7 p.m. on Thursday night and kept coming down all night. I knew I wouldn't be going anywhere much today (sigh). Milay and I went off to see Michael at 9 a.m. One look at the Matanikau told me I would not be wading across. It was a raging brown torrent and a lot of huts on the west bank were flooded. Milay said he had been flooded a bit too. We drove down to Tuvaruhu and the one-foot trickle of water on Monday was now an eight-foot flood.

Luckily they were not flooded. I cursed myself for not seeing Michael earlier. So we stood on opposite sides of the river and yelled across to each other:

P: 'Michael, I don't think I am going to wade across that!'

M: (laughing) 'No, me neither!'

P: 'I guess I will see you next time I come over?'

M: 'Yeah, you still have to walk Seahorse!'

There was no point trying Edson's Ridge or Gifu again — they would have been seas of mud. On the way back to the hotel we stopped at the market and I bought three more Coca-Cola bottles. I thanked Milay for all his driving and assistance during the week. I would not have got to a few places without his knowledge of the roads.

I sorted my clothes and relics and packed my bags. I had use of the room till 11 p.m., then the hotel minibus went to the airport at midnight. It was light rain now so I went down to Customs to say thanks and goodbye to Timothy. He took me out to the tip of Point Cruz (Customs property) for a few last photos.

I went back and saw Lawrence and picked up my permit and then down to the Mendana Hotel where I had lunch (the only time I ate lunch while I was on Guadalcanal). Buying a few T-shirts on the way I returned to the hotel for another swim, then went downstairs for dinner. The food is good at the King Solomon and all week I ate a 'Marine meal' of fish and rice. No doubt tastier than the 1942 variety with spice and fresh vegetables. During dinner they always used to have Honiara Radio playing songs in the background. As I sat there tonight they were playing

I'm leavin' on a jet plane,
Don't know when I'll be back again.

I couldn't help thinking how appropriate that sounded. Waiting in the foyer for the bus that night it was cooler than usual and no bugs were flying about. Driving to the airfield was the first time I had seen Guadalcanal 'after dark'. Now I appreciate more how pitch black it can be in the tropics when you get away from an electric light. I am sure night landings would have been fun. The plane departed Honiara at 2.20 a.m. on Friday morning and we got in to Brisbane at 4.20 a.m. I got a connecting flight to Melbourne at 5.10 a.m. and was home by 9.30 a.m.

POSTSCRIPT

Over the years, many other Solomon islanders, especially from Malaita Island, have come to Guadalcanal to live and work. There has always been ethnic and economic tension between these new arrivals and the Guadal natives. In June 1999 these tensions exploded into ethnic violence, with local people trying to drive out all Malaita people. This has resulted in murder, arson and a flood of refugees leaving the island.

Areas east of the Ilu river are now unsafe to travel freely. Similarly the area west of Kokumbona is controlled by the 'Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army' (GRA) and can be unsafe. Crime has increased in the wake of this, divers at wreck sites west of Honiara have been shot at and tourists robbed at resorts. The phone system is not working regularly, with non-Guadal natives having their phones cut off. I suspect that the Henderson hotel/cabin development is probably on indefinite hold in the current situation. The Poha river pig farm is now occupied by militants to obtain a source of food.

The village at Vilu is deserted, and Mrs Kona and family forced to flee to Malaita, but at present the relics there have not been damaged. Similarly the village at Edson's Ridge is deserted. Anyone looking around battle sites now is regarded suspiciously and runs the risk of being accused of being a 'spy'. Some Guadal islanders on Mount Austen have been shot dead in 'payback' killings.

With the GRA having driven the non-Guadal natives into the area around Honiara, there is now a stand-off. The latter cannot safely go outside the town and the Guadal natives cannot safely come in. This has of course had an effect on the Honiara market. Local clan chiefs want to calm things down, but there are plently of young militants. Fijian peace-keeping troops are deployed around Honiara now, but the situation remains tense. Not a safe environment for tourism in general or any sort of battlefield exploration in particular. I would like to go back again, but do not know when that will be. What does the future situation hold?

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Fifty-seven years after the famous Makin raid, in which the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion lost 30 men, the skeletal remains of 18 US marines were recovered from a mass grave on Butaritari, Makin atoll's main island, by a recovery team of the US Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CILHI). The grave-site was found in December 1999 after a systematic search conducted by the CILHI, vital information coming from a local old man, Mr Baramoa, *(above left)* **who had helped to bury the dead marines under Japanese supervision after the raid.** *Above right:* **The CILHI team delineating the contours of the mass grave.**

RECOVERY OF MISSING MAKIN RAIDERS

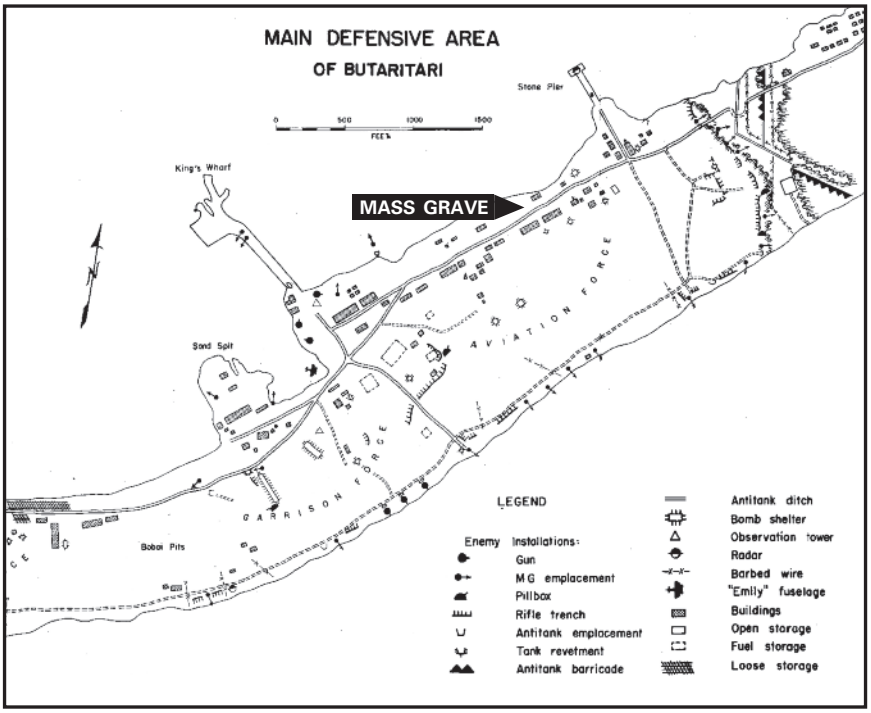
By Karel Margry

In the early hours of August 17, 1942, 221 US marines of the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion commanded by Major Evans F. Carlson landed from two US submarines, the *Nautilus* and the *Argonaut*, on the Japanese-held island of Butaritari in Makin atoll in the Central Pacific (see *After the Battle* No. 15). The Japanese had occupied the island in December 1941 and installed a seaplane base in its lagoon. Designed as a diversion for the Guadalcanal operation, the raid was to attract Japanese forces away from the Solomons. The marines were to attack the small Japanese garrison, blow up installations and destroy the seaplanes. By 0545 hours, Carlson's Raiders had occupied Government House without opposition and pinpointed the main Japanese force near On Chong's Wharf. The *Nautilus* brought gunfire to bear on the area, sinking a 3,500-ton merchant ship and a patrol boat, and the marines fought several spirited battles with the defenders. Japanese aircraft strafed and bombed the island and the submarines during the afternoon, but two Japanese seaplanes attempting to land in the lagoon were destroyed.

Although the marines began to withdraw from the island's southern shore at 1700 hours, because of the heavy surf the evacuation by rubber boats to the waiting submarines was not completed until the evening of the second day. The raiders had killed at least 83 Japanese. Eighteen Americans had been killed and 12 others did not make it to the beach rendezvous and were left behind. Three of these were captured a day later and marched through the village of Butaritari. It is not known whether they were taken away as prisoners of war or executed and their remains have never been found. The nine remaining men were captured two weeks later and taken to Kwajalein, where they were executed.

Although the much-publicised raid was a morale booster for the Americans, it led the Japanese to reinforce their garrison of the Gilbert Islands, making the subsequent capture of these islands more costly than it should have been.

Fifty-seven years later, in December 1999, a search team of the US Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CILHI) located and recovered from a mass grave on Butaritari the skeletal remains of 20 men believed to include the 18 US marines known to have been killed in action during the Makin raid. Among these are possibly the remains of Sergeant Clyde Thomason, the first enlisted marine awarded the Medal of Honor during World War II. Of the remaining two individuals found, one according to local accounts is a local young man executed by the Japanese for the murder of another islander. Nothing as yet is known about the other person. The Butaritari recovery represents the largest number of individuals recovered from a single site by the CILHI to date.



Butaritari (Makin atoll) is part of the Central Pacific republic of Kiribati, the island group formerly known as the Gilbert Islands, and is inhabited by some 4,000 people. The mass grave was located on the northern shore between King's Wharf and Stone Pier, just between the island road and the beach.

The presence of human remains having been confirmed by means of a cesium magnetometer, Bradley Sturm, the team anthropologist, puts the spade to the ground. All pictures were taken by CILHI photographer SPC Christopher Licking.

To outline the area to be searched, a one-metre-wide trench is dug around the suspected grave area.

The CILHI was set up in May 1976 in Honolulu, Hawaii, as the US Armed Forces central agency for the recovery and identification of all unrecovered US military personnel from past wars. Based since 1992 at a new facility on Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu, the CILHI comprises some 170 military and civilian personnel commanded by a US Army colonel, and is divided into a Command and Support Section and three other sections.

The Operations Section maintains 13 standing search and recovery teams which travel the world conducting surveys and excavations of crash and burial sites associated with the loss of US personnel. Each team includes a team leader (usually a Quartermaster captain), a forensic anthropologist, a team sergeant, several mortuary specialist, a qualified medic, and a photographer. If needed, an explosive ordnance technician, a linguist and an aircraft wreckage analyst can be added.

In recent years, most of the section's work has been focused on the former battlefields of the Vietnam War — six teams deploying to Vietnam and three or four to Laos five times a year, and one team going to Cambodia twice a year. However, after a breakthrough in negotiations with North Korea, there is now unprecedented access to sites of the Korean War — deployment in North Korea increasing from one team in 1996 to six in 1999. Other worldwide recoveries are conducted as resources allow. Most of them are World War II-related and occupy one team deploying five times per year. The past several years have seen missions to Australia, Russia, Tibet, China, India, Germany, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, South Korea, Papua New Guinea and many of the islands in the South Pacific (see *After the Battle* No. 66, page 47). Teams usually remain in the field for 30-35 days on each mission. Team members commonly spend in excess of 200 days a year in some of the most austere areas in the world.

Back at the CILHI base, the Casualty Data Analysis Section serves to locate, request, receive, research, archive and produce information and records for the scientific staff and recovery teams. These include maps, casualty reports, search and rescue reports, line of duty investigations, witness statements, graves registration records, etc. The section maintains personnel, medical and dental files on a staggering number of missing US servicemen: more than 78,000 from World War II: more than 8,100 from the Korean War; some 2,000 from the Vietnam War. The casualty data analysts compile names and background data on specific loss scenarios. If the remains come from an identified crash site, the records of the individuals who were on that specific aircraft are analyzed. If, however, the remains were unilaterally returned, the government or individual who has recovered the remains often also provides a presumed name, probable date of death, and location of recovery (like with the 1997 Southend Sands recovery — see *After the Battle* No. 99). The analysts then determine which person's loss scenario best matches this information. Next, the recovery site is plotted on a map and the files of all servicemen whose last-known location fall within the radius of a circle drawn around that point are screened as well. Medical, dental and biographical information on each possible candidate is then supplied to the scientific staff.

The CILHI Laboratory Section, responsible for examining the recovered remains, consists of 21 forensic anthropologists and three forensic odontologists. When remains are received at the laboratory, the specialists first attempt identification through standard forensic techniques and procedures, using state-of-the-art computers, microscopes, and radiological equipment. While DNA technology is proving an increasingly valuable tool, dental comparison continues to be the mainstay of the identification process. X-rays of the dental remains and details of tooth restorations and/or characteristics are entered into a computer and compared with a database containing the dental records of all US servicemen whose remains have not been recovered. This results in a list of most-likely candidates for a match, whose actual dental records are then compared with the dental remains.

US FATAL CASUALTIES ON THE MAKIN RAID (AUGUST 17-18, 1942)

Killed in action (*):

Capt Gerald P. Holtom
Sgt Clyde Thomason
Cpl I. B. Earles
Cpl Daniel A. Gaston
Cpl Kenneth K. Kunkle
Cpl Edward Maciejewski
Cpl Harris J. Johnson
Cpl Robert B. Pearson
Cpl Mason O. Yarbrough
FM1 Vernon L. Castle
Pfc William A. Gallagher
Pfc Ashley W. Hicks
Pfc Kenneth M. Montgomery
Pfc Norman W. Mortensen
Pfc John E. Vandenberg
Pfc Robert B. Maulding
Pvt Franklin M. Nodland
Pvt Charles A. Selby

(*) *Remains believed recovered from Butaritari in December 1999.*

Missing in action:

Sgt Robert V. Allard
Sgt Dallas H. Cook
Cpl James W. Beecher
Cpl Joseph Gifford
Pfc Richard E. Davis
Pfc Richard N. Olbert
Pfc William E. Pallesen
Pvt John I. Kerns
Pvt Carlyle O. Larson
Pvt Alden C. Mattison
Pvt Donald R. Robertson
Pvt Cletus Smith

The 18 marines recovered from the mass grave are believed to be those killed in action during the raid. Among them is Sergeant Clyde Thomason, the first enlisted marine awarded the Medal of Honor during World War II.

Simultaneously, a forensic anthropologist conducts an analysis of the skeletal remains. Working 'blind' (i.e. with no knowledge of the physical characteristics or even the number of individuals believed involved in the case), he draws up a biological profile which typically includes number of individuals, age, race, sex, stature, injuries, and any anomalies. These data are then compared with the known, recorded features of the missing individuals supplied by the Casualty Data Section.

The laboratory may consult or request help from several agencies, including the US Army's Pacific region medical centre, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, the FBI, and the Smithsonian Institution.

The scientists present their findings to the CILHI Scientific Director, who combines them with the background information supplied by the Casualty Data analysts and the results of other investigations, such as wreckage analysis, to decide whether or not the evidence will support an identification. The Scientific Director, working with his laboratory staff and board-certified consultants, acts like a Medical Examiner and establishes the identification of the remains. The identification is then forwarded by the CILHI commander to the Service Casualty Office, which will present the identification to the family. The next of kin have the right to have the case reviewed by an expert of their own choice. If not accepted by the family and their expert, the case is forwarded to the Armed Forces Identification Review Board, which consists of an Army colonel, a Navy captain (or Marine Corps colonel as the case may be) and an Air Force colonel. They will review the case and make a decision on the identification under the appeals process. Only then will the announcement of the identification be made. The remains are then transferred to a place of burial selected by the family, and interred with full military honours. Approved identifications in 1999 included 24 cases from World War II, two from the Korean War and 41 from the Vietnam War.

The search for the Marine raiders still missing from the Makin raid was initiated — like most World War II recovery missions — by the CILHI itself, based on information compiled by the Casualty Data analysts. The first search expedition to Butaritari took place in August 1998, followed by a second in May 1999, and a third in December of that year. The recovery team led by Captain Mark A. Hollingsworth initially tried to pinpoint the burial location by means of a cesium magnetometer (a device which can detect sub-surface anomalies), but with negative results. As they do on any recovery mission, the team also interviewed local people. On the third trip, they met an old man, Mr Baramoa, who told them that he was 16 years old when the raid occurred, and had in fact participated in the burial of the killed Americans. (Before the Raiders escaped to their submarines, Carlson had paid an island resident $50 to bury the American dead. According to local inhabitants, the workers were divided into two work groups under Japanese supervision: one to gather and cremate the Japanese bodies, and one to collect and bury the American dead.) Although the landscape had changed much since 1942, Mr Baramoa was able to lead the team to within five metres of the location where the remains were subsequently found — another example that even the most-advanced technology is no substitute for the personal memories of participants or local eyewitnesses, even if they are over 70 years of age.

After the location was determined, the team set up one-metre-wide trenches around the suspected grave-site, outlining the area where the digging process would take place. Under close supervision of the team anthropologist, Bradley Sturm, a substantial amount of coral sand was moved in a couple of days by the team with the help of local citizens.

Slowly and meticulously, the outlined area is excavated. At the rear, suspended from the wooden structure, are the filter screens used to sift the sand from the grave pit to make sure that nothing is overlooked. The CILHI team employed a large number of local workers to help with the digging and sifting.

On December 14, after only two days of digging, the team uncovered human remains and personal effects which clearly related to the marines lost in the Makin Raid. All these were slowly and carefully taken out of the sand by Sturm and other team members. In all, 20 sets of skeletal remains were found, and removed. To ensure that nothing was missed, the sand from the grave was collected in buckets and then sifted through a filter screen set up at the site. Each item left on the screen was inspected very carefully by a team expert. With the excavation complete, the team back-filled the site and restored the landscape to its original condition as much as possible.

All of the remains and artifacts recovered were to be brought to the CILHI establishment at Hawaii for the final identification process. As soon as they received news of the possible recovery of the lost Raiders, the US Marine Corps in Hawaii sent a KC-130 Hercules aircraft carrying a Marine Color Guard in full dress to Butaritari to escort the recovery team and remains back to Hawaii.

On December 17, in a formal repatriation ceremony at Butaritari airfield, the remains were put aboard the aircraft and then flown to Hickam Air Force Base, where they arrived that same afternoon.

Despite the strong evidence that the remains found on Butaritari are those of the Makin Raid marines, positive identification will still need to be carried out by the CILHI. This can take a year to 18 months to complete.

The 20 sets of remains recovered from the mass grave are ceremoniously carried into the Marine KC-130 aircraft that is to take them to Hawaii for final identification. During the ceremony, there came an unexpected tribute from the old Butaritari man who began to sing the *Marine Corps Hymn* — an amazing feat because he did not speak much English and it had been so many years since the marines were on the island.

BATTLE OVER MALTA

By Anthony Rogers

The Battle of Malta began soon after dawn on June 11, 1940 with a raid on the island by 55 Savoia Marchetti S.79s escorted by 18 Macchi C.200s. It culminated in a week-long offensive by the Luftwaffe and Regia Aeronautica in October 1942. Raids by fighters and fighter-bombers would continue into 1943, but by then the battle had already been won.

After sustaining two and a half years of aerial warfare, some might think that Malta must be a veritable aircraft graveyard. However, many aircraft were lost over the Mediterranean, while Malta's rocky terrain ensured that those which crashed on land frequently broke up on impact. This was no doubt welcomed by salvage crews, whose thoroughness was partly attributable to the island's geological structure. Not so good for latter-day aviation enthusiasts, though I was always convinced that there had to be more remaining from this epic battle than a few scraps of torn and twisted metal.

Except for the approximate locations of some aircraft crashes, culled from police records by Philip Vella, the late Honorary Secretary of Malta's National War Museum Association, I was unaware of any other lists that would help me to determine where an aircraft had fallen during the Battle of Malta. I had already examined available RAF files at the Public Record Office, in Kew. None contained the information I was seeking, but I knew that someone must have logged the time and place of aircraft crashes, and in March 1995 revisited the PRO. After three days I finally found what I was looking for in an army war diary: a six figure map reference of an aircraft crash site. After reading through every available diary of Malta-based units in 1940-42, I was able to compile a 38-page document beginning with the shooting down of a Savoia Marchetti S.79 on July 10, 1940, and ending with a Beaufighter crash on Christmas Day 1942. After more than 450 hours at the PRO and many more hours at London's Imperial War Museum, the RAF Museum at Hendon and in Malta itself, and after having amassed volumes of correspondence with surviving veterans, my work has grown into a sizeable account covering nearly 200 aircraft losses.

During three recent trips to Malta, I was fortunate to have been assisted by local enthusiast Robert Farrugia, whose diligence and persistence has enabled him to rediscover numerous crash sites. In the vast majority of cases, a few alloy scraps were indeed all that remained, but not always.

Top: **Members of 10th HAA Regiment with wreckage of a Ju 87 at Ghar Hanzir, just north-west of Luqa aerodrome. This was almost certainly a Stuka of II/StG 1 crewed by either Oberleutnant Kurt Reumann and Unteroffizier August-Wilhelm Shulz, or Feldwebel Johann Braun and Feldwebel Justin Kästle, all of whom were killed on February 26, 1941. (Malcolm Oxley)** *Above:* **Now overgrown with brambles, the same spot in September 1999. On leaving the site, the author found a sizeable piece of wreckage still lodged between some boulders. (Anthony Rogers)**

Beach post behind Knights' watch tower (It-Torri Ta' Triq il-Wiesgha) at Zonqor, on Malta's east coast, where an S.79 of 195ª Squadriglia crashed on July 10, 1940. There were no survivors from this, the first enemy aircraft to be shot down on Maltese soil. (Anthony Rogers)

On July 16, 1940 Flight Lieutenant Peter Keeble of the island's Fighter Flight was the first fighter pilot killed in the defence of Malta when his Hurricane crashed on this slope at Wied il-Ghajn. Tenente Mario Benedetti of 74ª Squadriglia was fatally injured when his FIAT CR 42 crashed close by. (Anthony Rogers)

In order to confirm a crash site, Robert and I must ideally find evidence in situ: recognisable aluminium or alloy fragments, perspex or ammunition, for example; or be able to identify the location from wartime photographs. When this is not possible, we often have to rely on the testimony of eyewitnesses, many of whom have surprisingly vivid recollections even after nearly 60 years. Usually, it isn't difficult to identify an aircraft type and its pilot or crew, with the curious exception of most Messerschmitt Bf 109s. Typical are two which crashed near Hal Far aerodrome in south-east Malta.

At 1031 hours on February 7, 1942, Malta's air raid sirens heralded the approach of four Junkers Ju 88s escorted by an estimated 17 Bf 109s. At 1120, two of the fighters strafed a No. 69 Squadron Beaufighter as it landed at Luqa, in the centre of the island. After setting the Beaufighter on fire, the 109s headed towards Hal Far, where one received a direct hit from a 40mm Bofors which blew off its tail; the aircraft diving into the ground just short of the airfield. The pilot, Oberfeldwebel Otto Göthe of 6/JG 53, was killed instantly.

At about the same time on April 14, the Kommandeur of II/JG 3, Hauptmann Karl-Heinz Krahl, was killed in similar circumstances when his Bf 109 was also hit by AA fire during a low-level attack on Hal Far. According to the war diary of 2nd Battalion The Devonshire Regiment, the aircraft crashed 800 yards from HF5, an observation post north-west of the airfield.

Robert and I spent three years trying to locate both crash sites, but those we spoke to remembered only one Bf 109 coming down in fields just west of Lyster Barracks, a post-war development approximately 600 yards from HF5. We scoured the area again and again without coming across any tangible evidence, which seemed inconceivable, as both aircraft were reported to have exploded on impact. We then met a gentleman who recalled a Bf 109 coming down in another field 300-400 yards away and within 200 yards of HF5. The landowner also recalled the event and was even able to show us where the aircraft first struck the ground before hurtling in a south-easterly direction, the engine coming to rest in a nearby clump of carob trees. Proof that a Bf 109 had indeed crashed here was provided by wreckage stamped with the correct aircraft part number. The pilot's remains, we were told, had been buried where they were found.

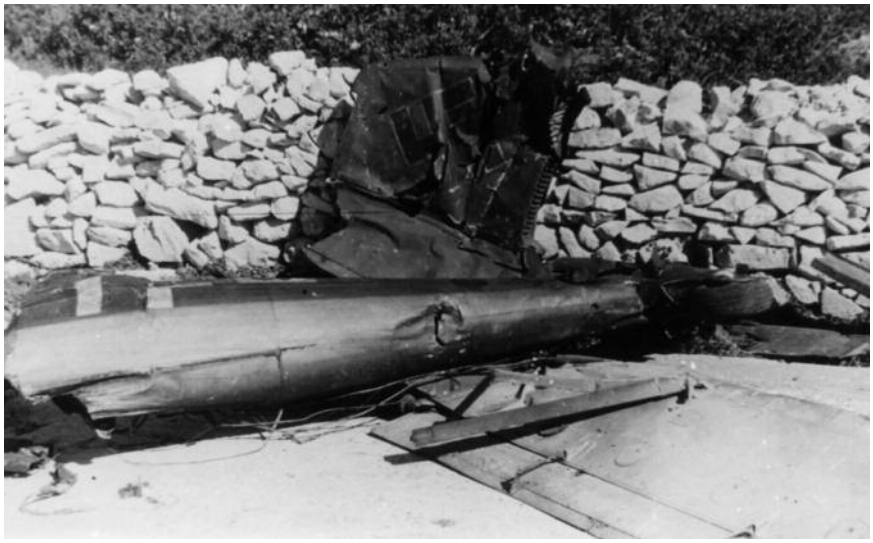
Crash site of a Messerschmitt Bf 109 that was probably piloted by Oberfeldwebel Otto Göthe of 6/JG 53 who was killed after being shot down by AA on February 7, 1942 during an attack on Hal Far aerodrome (the post-war control tower can be seen in the distance). The aircraft initially slammed into the ground just behind and to the left of this spot before smashing into the stone pile in the foreground; the wreckage being spread between here and the trees on the right. Note the wall running across the field — still fire-blackened from the crash! Göthe was posted missing and this may provide a significant clue to the identity of the pilot whose fragmented remains are said to have been buried here. (Anthony Rogers)

The wreckage of Hauptmann Karl-Heinz Krahl's Bf 109 shot down by AA near Hal Far on April 14, 1942. The pilot's remains were transferred to Sicily after the war. (NWMA)

One of several adjoining fields said to be the crash site of a Bf 109, believed to have been Hauptmann Krahl's 8784/'Doppelwinkel' machine. (Anthony Rogers)

If the war diary of the 2 Devons is correct, this site is much too close to Post HF5 for it to be Krahl's. War diaries can and do contain errors, but could someone have misjudged so short a distance to such an extent? Even if Göthe was killed here, and Krahl died opposite Lyster Barracks, it would mean that the war diary was still 300 yards short in measuring the distance to the crash from HF5. However, no other Bf 109s are known to have crashed in the area, and surely so many eyewitnesses cannot be mistaken. Perhaps the crash report is based on a bearing to an explosion or fire at the initial point of impact, whereas local eyewitnesses recall seeing where the wreckage finally came to rest. Possibly, but this still doesn't explain the lack of material evidence in the area. Efforts to solve the mystery continue.

Photographs are often the best and most reliable aid in locating an aircraft crash site and, after acquiring a unique set of images showing the wreckage of a German bomber, Robert and I set out to find where they were taken. Robert soon identified the location as just north-west of Luqa aerodrome. Research revealed that the aircraft was a Ju 87 of II/StG 1 which was almost certainly lost on February 26, 1941, though the identity of the crew has yet to be confirmed.



Another Ju 87 which fell on February 26, 1941, was 5152/6G+ER of II/StG 3; Unteroffizier Heinz Langreder and Gefreiter Erwin Suckow both losing their lives when the aircraft crashed on the north-east perimeter of Luqa aerodrome, south-west of St Bartholomew Hospital. (NWMA)

Left: **The remains of Ju 88 1346/M7+AK of 2/KGr 806 which crashed near Ta'Srina, on the outskirts of Zebbug on January 3, 1942, after being attacked by Hurricanes of No. 126 and, probably, No. 185 Squadrons. Oberleutnant Viktor Schnez, Feldwebel (or Oberfeldwebel) Ulrich Arnold, Obergefreiter Gerhard Hoppe and Feldwebel Heinrich Freese all baled out and were taken prisoner. (Anthony Rogers Collection)** *Above:* **More than 56 years later, a large tree makes an exact comparison difficult. This picture was taken from a slightly higher angle than the wartime photograph. (Anthony Rogers)**

Another crash site still to be positively identified is situated immediately below Ras il-Qammieh, a rocky headland in north-west Malta. The pilot was killed when his aircraft, a Hurricane, apparently flew into the cliff face. Three years ago, Robert Farrugia recovered the tail section, complete with cannon-shell damage, indicating that the aircraft was lost in combat. No records have yet been found to confirm the pilot's identity, but research indicates that it was almost certainly Flying Officer John Southwell of No. 261 Squadron who died on March 22, 1941, or Warrant Officer Douglas Corfe of No. 229 Squadron who perished on April 25, 1942.

All too many artefacts have been recovered from crash sites without any attempt being made to record their provenance, but it is still possible to find identifiable wreckage such as this 'well cover'; actually part of a Ju 88 0149/R4+MM of I/NJG 2 which crashed at Ghar Mundu, in south Malta, in the morning of January 18, 1942. The three-man crew: Leutnant Felix-Dieter Schleif, Gefreiter (or Obergerfreiter) Rolf Wiegand and Gefreiter Karl-Heinz Bülow all perished. (Anthony Rogers)

Left: **Sergeant John Fullalove of No. 229 Squadron was killed when his Hurricane was shot down on April 21, 1942, crashing in the area between these two buildings.** *Right:* **This RAF cap badge was found in the same field more than 56 years later.**

Occasionally, a chance find can help solve such a problem. In October 1997, Robert located the crash site of a British fighter in a field south-west of Fort San Leonardo, in the north-east of the Island. According to eyewitnesses, the event had occured in or around April, though none could be certain about the year. The body of the pilot was found closeby, and by all accounts was burned beyond recognition. It was soon learned that Sergeant John Fullalove of No. 229 Squadron had been killed when his Hurricane was shot down, falling in pieces just above this location on April 21, 1942. In September 1998, an RAF OR's cap badge, twisted and showing signs of fire damage, was found in the field where, we were told, the dead pilot had come to rest. It certainly seemed that whoever had died here had been a SNCO, but was it Sergeant Fullalove?

A check of the 18 fighter pilots lost while operating from Malta in April 1941 and 1942, revealed that just two or three fell at unidentified locations on the island: Sergeant Fullalove; Pilot Officer Oliver Ormrod, who was killed in quite different circumstances (and whose Hurricane probably fell offshore); and Warrant Officer Douglas Corfe who, as stated, fell in another sector altogether. There was no longer any doubt about the identity of the body found at San Leonardo.

Sometimes, an error or misleading information in a document or a published account, can lead to hours, even years of wasted effort before the mistake is realised. An example is the death of Pilot Officer Robert Matthews of No. 249 Squadron on December 22, 1941. More than one book describes how his Hurricane flew into the sea-wall (presumably the breakwater) at Valletta. In fact, his Hurricane dived almost vertically into the ground close to Addolorata Cemetery, near Paola.

Thankfully, most crash sites are not nearly as difficult to find and identify. Just 800 metres south-east of where Sergeant Fullalove was killed are the crash sites of two aeroplanes: Flight Lieutenant Peter Keeble was the first of Malta's fighter pilots to be killed when his Hurricane was chased down by a FIAT CR 42 flown by Tenente Mario Benedetti of 74ª Squadriglia in the morning of July 16, 1940. Both machines dived into the ground at Wied il-Ghajn, an area still littered with fragmented remains and exploded rounds.

Of the many eyewitnesses I have talked to, Edgar Smith is exceptional in being able to accurately recall most of the wartime crashes around his home village of Marsaxlokk, in south-east Malta. Among the sites he showed me is that of a Ju 87 of 8/StG 3 which was shot down, possibly by AA, in the evening of April 1, 1942, during a raid involving an estimated 70 Ju 87s, Ju 88s and Bf 109s. The gunner, Gefreiter Wilhelm Neubauer, was killed, while the pilot, Unteroffizier Winfried Günther, baled out into the sea and was later taken prisoner. The Stuka crashed on the edge of a cliff at Il-Qali and Edgar was one of many who arrived to view the spectacle. Soon after he left, a bomb still on board the aircraft exploded with deadly results, killing a number of military personnel, and leaving a crater which can still be seen.

On April 1, 1942, Ju 87 2147/T6+FN of 8/StG 3 crashed at Il-Qali on the east coast. The pilot, Unteroffizier Winfried Günther, survived, unlike the gunner, Gefreiter Wilhelm Neubauer. That night, a bomb carried by the Stuka exploded, killing a group of servicemen who had gathered at the scene. A civilian, Edgar Smith, escaped a similar fate when he left shortly before the blast. He is seen standing in the crater caused by the explosion. (Anthony Rogers)

At Lija, a village in central Malta, an equally poignant reminder serves as a memorial to two of those killed during a raid between 1609 and 1656 hours on May 9, 1942. This, the fifth alert since dawn, began with the approach of approximately 20 Bf 109s and 18 Ju 87s; the latter bombing the Luqa and Grand Harbour areas and causing a number of casualties. The raiders were engaged by both AA and the RAF; 21 Spitfires being reported airborne from Nos. 185, 249 and 603 Squadrons. Although seven pilots were credited with damaging or probably destroying eight enemy aircraft, available German records for May 9, 1942 confirm only the loss of Unteroffizier Helmut Schierning of 6/JG 53. At least one RAF fighter was also damaged, while Sergeant Gordon Tweedale, an Australian in No. 185 Squadron, was shot down and killed in his first sortie in a Spitfire having transferred from Hurricanes the previous day. Possibly, the victor was Hauptmann Helmut Belser of 8/JG 53. A gunner in the Royal Malta Artillery also died when Spitfire Mk VC BR248 crashed in Saviour Street, Lija, where the wall of a building still has the scars made by the fighter at the end of its terminal dive.

When Sergeant Gordon Tweedale was shot down and killed on May 9, 1942, his Spitfire dived into Saviour Street, Lija, leaving scars which are still visible on the wall beneath the window of this house. (Anthony Rogers)

Above: **The wreckage of a Ju 87 of 9/StG 3 on the coast at Zonqor after being shot down by Pilot Officer Jack Slade of No. 603 Squadron on May 3, 1942. The pilot, Gefreiter Karl Haff, died in the crash, but incredibly the gunner, Gefreiter Fritz Weber, survived. (IWM)** *Below:* **The same stretch of coastline today. (Anthony Rogers)**

Left: **It proved surprisingly difficult to identify the crash site of this Bf 109, until aviation enthusiast Robert Farrugia recognised it as Marsa Sports Club. It is now known that this is the wreckage of 7513/Black 3 from which Unteroffizier Heinrich Becker of 8/JG 53 baled out and was captured after being shot down by AA on May 8, 1942. (Anthony Rogers Collection)** *Right:* **The twin spires of St Sebastian Church at Qormi are clearly visible in both images, although an exact comparison is difficult due to landscaping of the club's golf course. (Anthony Rogers)**

This S.84 Bis, one of two such aircraft shot down by Spitfires of No. 249 Squadron on July 4, 1942, fell at Ta'Garda and is thought to have been a 14[a] Squadriglia machine from which Aviere Scelto Arduino Pelleschi baled out after being seriously wounded by AA fire. The five remaining crewmen were killed. (IWM/NWMA)

For those interested in more obvious signs of the battle, one has only to look in a field below Laferla Cross, near Siggiewi, where the remains of a pair of Hispano cannon are firmly lodged in bedrock beneath the shallow topsoil. This is almost certainly where a Spitfire of No. 126 Squadron crashed on July 3, 1942, after American Pilot Officer Richard McHan was forced to bale out, apparently as a result of engine failure.

No less surprising is the amount of aircraft wreckage utilised in various ways by farmers and others in outlying areas. One fellow still uses as a well cover what appears to be a wing panel from Ju 88 0149/R4+MM which came down at Ghar Mundu, on the south coast, in the morning of January 18, 1942. None of the crew survived the crash, which was probably caused by the pilot losing his bearings due to bad visibility.

An aileron from Spitfire VB EP685 flown by Flying Officer Alec Lindsay of No. 185 Squadron who was shot down and killed on October 23, 1942, serves as a well cover for another farmer on the south coast.

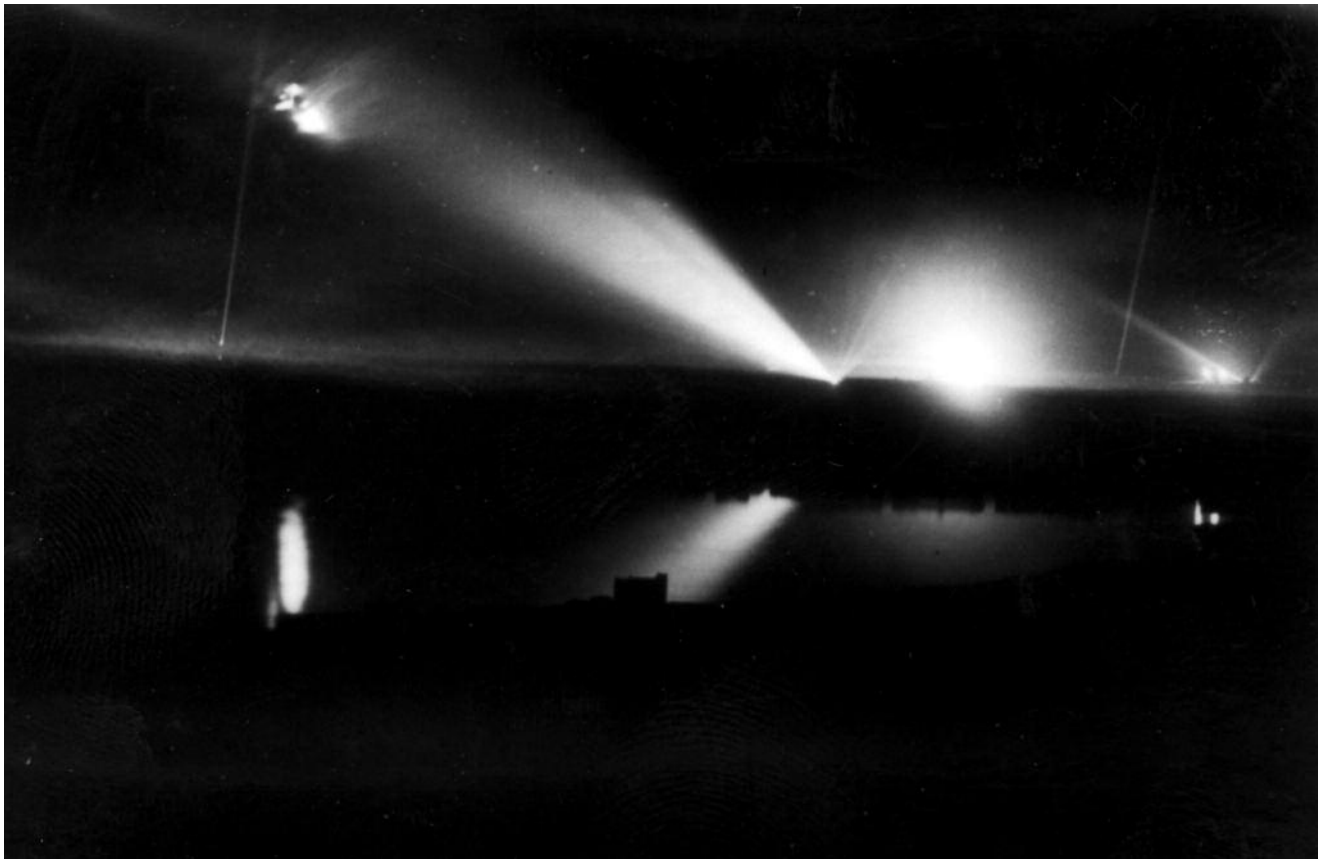
A complete dinghy and survival equipment container from Messerschmitt Bf 110 3723/KB+NC in which both crewmen were killed after being shot down at Tas-Sriedak, near Ta'Qali, on March 5, 1941, was, until very recently, used as yet another well cover.

While investigating the crash site of a Bf 109 thought to have been piloted by Feldwebel Alexander Kehlbuth of 5/JG 53, Robert was told that a wing, which may have come from this aircraft, was used as filler beneath a tiled floor!

A similar fate apparently befell the engine of the last Bf 109G lost over Malta from which Unteroffizier Hermann Harnisch of JG 53 baled out and was captured on June 29, 1943.

With little information available in the original captions, it took several years to identify the crash site shown in the wartime photographs. When it was located between Ghaxaq and Birzebbuga in south-east Malta, the area was found to have changed little in 55 years, but within a year of this comparison being taken, a rubbish tip and a new dirt road had transformed much of the site. (Anthony Rogers)

Left: **Gun batteries also had their share of kills. This is a 3.7-inch heavy anti-aircraft gun team in action at XHB 8, situated at Il Mara, on the south coast — part of the defences of the RAF stations at Hal Far and Safi and of the flying-boat base at Kalafrana. (Stan Fraser)** *Right:* **The sadly neglected gun site today. (Anthony Rogers)**



During the night of July 20/21, 1942, XHB 8 was credited with two out of three Ju 88s brought down by anti-aircraft fire. In this dramatic photograph taken by Stan Fraser of 4th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, one of the German machines — 6579/3Z+FS — is seen crashing at Kirkop (flash right of centre) while searchlights illuminate another raider (top left). AA guns — probably XHE 24M at Il-Marnisi — can also be seen firing (far right). (Stan Fraser)

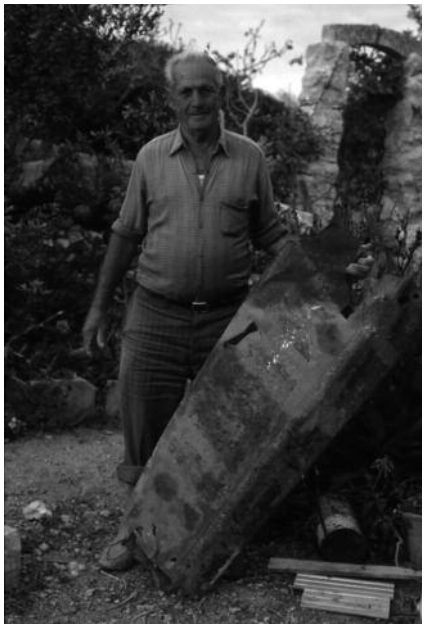
Many wartime souvenirs are now displayed at the islands's National War Museum, at Fort St Elmo, in Valletta. Other artefacts have been acquired by private collectors. Sometimes, though, it is possible to come across an unexpected find in the most unlikely place. After asking an old gentleman about a Bf 109 that had crashed nearby, Robert and I were invited into his home to look at a cannon shell which had been retrieved from the aircraft in question. We were then shown numerous types of ammunition. There were also several examples of German bombs and various items retrieved from crashed German aircraft. Just when we thought we had seen everything, our host pushed aside a wardrobe to reveal a recess in which was stored even more artefacts, including an MG 17 in excellent condition. This had been retrieved from the wreckage of a Ju 87 which fell in Bull Street, Cospicua. Another machine gun was produced, a Browning this time, which was said to be from a Hurricane which had been attacked from below by a lone Bf 109 while returning with a second fighter to Ta'Qali. Was the old man certain about the aircraft type? He said it had to be a Hurricane, as Spitfires were equipped with cannon, not Brownings! Of course, many of Malta's Spitfires would have been armed with both weapons, so the Browning could really have come from either aircraft type. In fact, Flight Lieutenant Norman MacQueen of No. 249 Squadron was killed when his Spitfire was shot down in identical circumstances on May 4, 1942.

While researching my book, I obtained a better understanding of events by visiting wartime airfields and other military installations, especially the concrete emplacements of AA guns which played such a crucial role.

At Luqa Barracks, four beautifully refurbished Vickers Armstrong 3.7-inch HAA guns have been on display since they were presented to Malta by Stan Fraser in June 1992. Stan, who served as a gunner in 4th HAA Regiment, bought the guns from a dealer in Wales with the idea of creating a memorial to British and Maltese gunners who lost their lives during the battle. It is hoped that one day the guns will be relocated to a more appropriate setting, such as XHB 10, on the south coast, where Stan was based for much of his time in Malta.

The fields at the junction of Salvu Sacco and Nerik Xerri Streets, Kirkop, where Ju 88 3Z+FS crashed with the loss of Feldwebel Karl Bonk, Unteroffizier Johann Gerstel, Unteroffizier Gerhard Priewisch and Unteroffizier Josef Pohl. (Anthony Rogers)

The force of the crash was such that one of the crew was flung some distance through this house window (the shutters of which have since been replaced). Staining underneath the adjacent balcony is said to be blood from the unfortunate German. (Anthony Rogers)



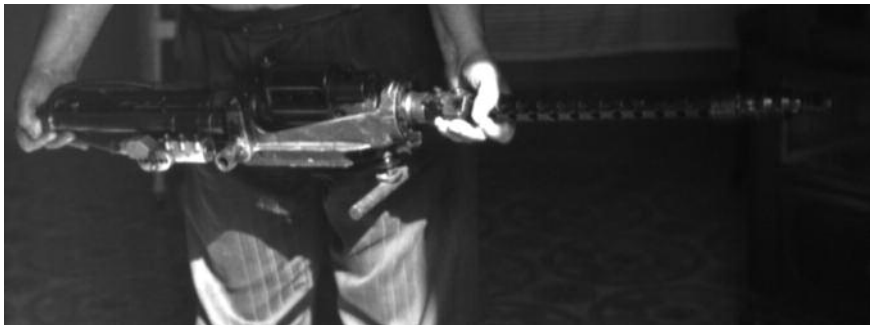
When I visited the area in September 1999, the gun emplacements were still in a reasonably good state of repair, with camouflage paint still in evidence. I even found a fuze cap from an AA shell, some 57 years after it was discarded by one of the gunners.

Stan Fraser kept a unique photographic record of his time in Malta. One of his pictures shows Ju 88 6579/3Z+FS of 8/KG 77 exploding as it crashed at Kirkop just before midnight on July 20, 1942. There were no survivors.

I was keen to see the site of XHB 8, whose gunners were credited with shooting down two of the three bombers destroyed on this occasion. The tiny fields where the crash occured have so far escaped the fate of a nearby housing development, but the gun position was a disappointment. XHB 8, near Benghisa, was one of the most heavily bombed gun sites, but it is the Maltese themselves who are to blame for today's devastation, with land reclamation and piles of rubbish having ruined a once picturesque area.

It is a pattern being repeated throughout the island. In 1997, I visited the crash site of an S.84 Bis shot down by Spitfires of No. 249 Squadron on July 4, 1942. The bomber had come down in a scenic valley at Ta'Garda, in south-east Malta, in terrain that was virtually unchanged from that shown in photographs taken at the time. But when I revisited the area in 1998, I found it transformed by a new dirt road and mounds of rubble. One reason, if any is needed, why a record of such sites is long overdue.

Left: **On July 24, 1942, Canadian Pilot Officer Rod Smith of No. 126 Squadron claimed his first enemy aircraft shot down; Ju 88 140247/M7+KH of KGr 806 crashing close to the Neolithic temples of Mnajdra and Hagar Qim, on the south coast. Leutnant Sepp Hörmann, Obergefreiter Josef Popp and Unteroffizier Wolfram Quass were killed, while the wireless operator, Leutnant Heinz Heuser, baled out and was taken prisoner. Fifty-five years later, Robert Farrugia examines a chunk of wreckage found in a field near the crash site.** *Centre:* **Giuseppe Abela with an aileron recovered from Spitfire VB EP685 flown by Flying Officer Alec Lindsay after he was shot down and killed near Dingli on October 23, 1942.** *Top right:* **A field gate near Dingli, apparently manufactured from aircraft skinning, probably from a Hurricane known to have crashed in the area.** *Above right:* **The close-up clearly shows repair work almost certainly carried out as a result of earlier battle or shrapnel damage.** *Below:* **MG 17 from a Ju 87 that crashed in Bull Street, Cospicua. (all Anthony Rogers)**



Anthony Rogers is the author of Battle Over Malta, Aircraft Losses and Crash Sites, 1940-42, *published by Sutton.*

Left: **This Macchi C.202 MM7842 of 378[a] Squadriglia, shot down on the outskirts of Zebbug, Gozo, by Canadian Sergeant George 'Screwball' Beurling of No. 249 Squadron on July 27, 1942. The pilot, Sergente Maggiore Faliero Gelli, survived. (IWM)** *Right:* **Robert Farrugia attempts to relocate the site of the crash-landing on the northern slope of Ta'Kuljat. (Anthony Rogers)**

And so the search goes on. Anyone who is familiar with the Maltese countryside will well appreciate the difficulty of matching up photographs like this and it is all credit to Anthony and his colleague in Malta, Robert Farrugia, who have located nearly 200 aircraft crash sites. Anthony's book is essential reading for those interested in the subject.

Owing to the protracted fighting in the Vosges, Natzweiler was not liberated until November 1944, the first patrols of the US 3rd Infantry Division reaching the camp on the 23rd. By then, the SS guards had abandoned the camp and fled. A US Seventh Army documents team entered the camp at 1000 hours on the 26th. *Left:* **GIs on the platform of Schirmeck station, some 50 kilometres south-west of Strasbourg, The nearby railway station at Rothau was used as a transit point for the inmates. (USNA) The history of the camp and its surroundings has been an on-going project for our author Nigel Smith over a number of years. He found the same iron railing still in place on the Schirmeck platform** *(right)*.

NATZWEILER-STRUTHOF CONCENTRATION CAMP

By Nigel Smith, MBE

Names such as Auschwitz, Belsen and Dachau, each with their sad and dreadful litany of human suffering and depravity, are all too familiar, but equally infamous, though less known, is Natzweiler-Struthof located in Eastern France.

In her book *Flames in the Field* (Penguin Books, 1995), Rita Kramer writes that 'the guidebooks describe the picturesque villages in the pleasant resort area of the Vosges mountains in Alsace, the region of Eastern France known as the Bas Rhin, saying that "there is not much to do except rest and take long walks through the pine woods". However, the traveller furnished with Michelin map No. 87, having followed one of the main roads out of Strasbourg or Colmar, can take the road marked N420 to the town of Schirmeck with its quaint railway station, and continue a few miles south to the village of Rothau. From there it is only a few minutes' drive along the twisting D130 mountain road past deep green forest broken by occasional glimpses of bright blue sky and windblown puffs of white cloud until the spot where in the late 1980s a signpost directed motorists and climbers the way "To Bar-Restaurant" and, below that, "To Gas Chamber".

'The bar-restaurant', continues Rita, 'is inside a small hotel described in the red Michelin guide as "pleasant, quiet, and well-situated". It is across the road from the tile-roofed building that was the gas chamber, before the war a restaurant serving inexpensive meals to skiers. Here in August 1943, inside the former restaurant which had been extensively renovated for the purpose, lethal gas was administered to 87 Jews, 57 men and 30 women, who were selected to be brought here to France from Auschwitz for the purpose of "medical experimentation". A lit-

In the waiting room of Rothau station, a plaque now records its role in history. 'In this place between 1941-1944 came thousands of deportees of all nationalities en route to the Nazi concentration camp of Natzweiler-Struthof. Passers by remember these martyrs for liberty.' From here it was an eight-kilometre journey to the camp. (Note: Natzweiler-Struthof is often and easily confused with Stutthof, the concentration camp near Danzig in occupied Poland.) (USNA)

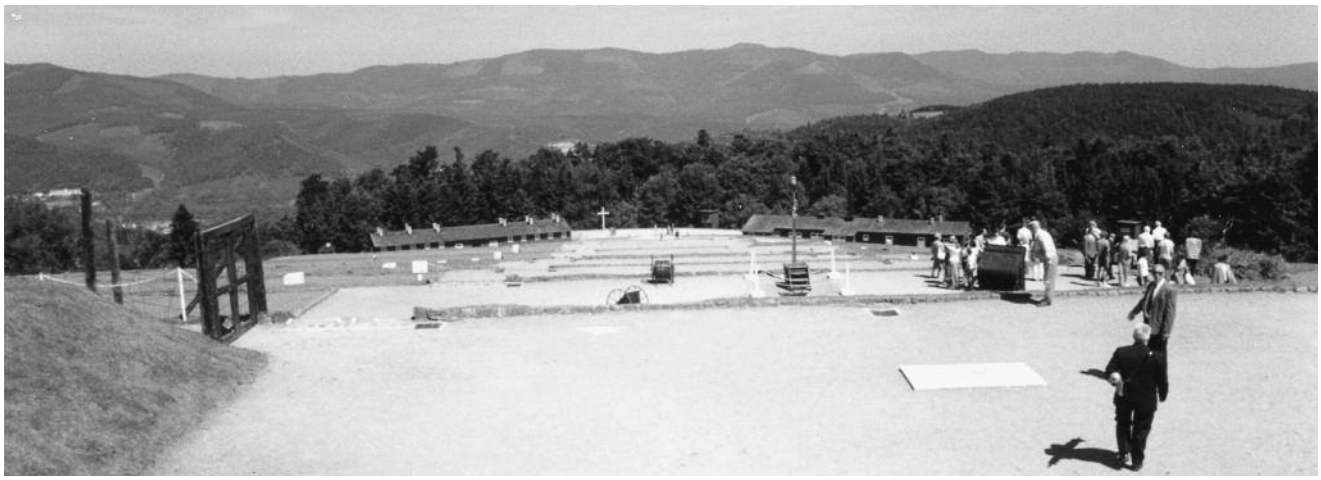
Natzweiler was selected as a concentration camp (with forced labour to be carried out in the nearby granite quarry) by SS-Standartenführer Blumberg of the SS firm Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH (German Mining and Quarrying Company — DEST) in September 1940, and the first inmates arrived on May 21, 1941: 300 German political prisoners transferred here from Sachsenhausen. Two members of the French Resistance mount guard after the liberation of the camp in November 1944.

tle glass panel enabled doctors to observe the reactions of the men and women inside. After gassing, the bodies were kept in three deep tile-lined tanks designed to preserve them until they could be used as cadavers for dissecting by medical students. The skulls and skeletons were to become part of a collection being assembled by SS doctors and professors of the Faculty of Medicine at the Institute of Anatomy in the University of Strasbourg Municipal Hospital.

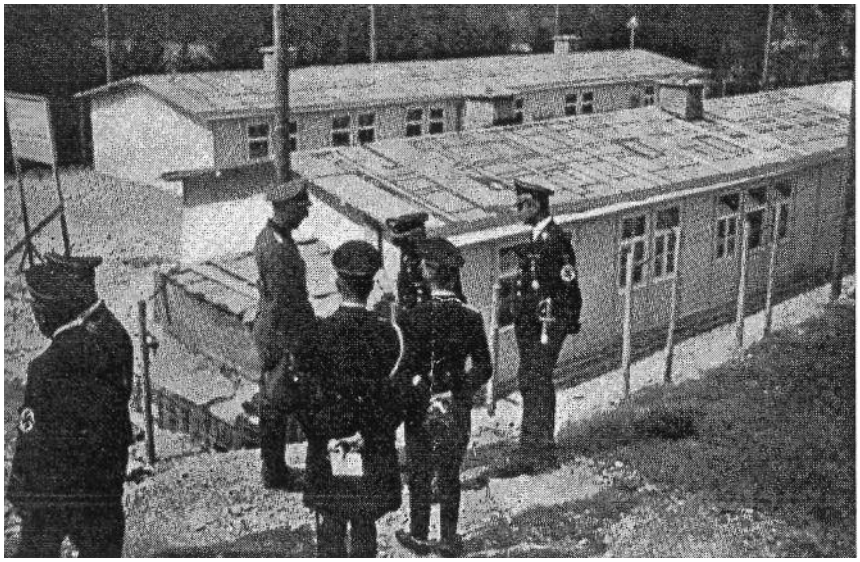
'Just a few minutes further along the mountain road, well marked today and much travelled by cars and by school and tourist buses, is Natzweiler-Struthof. Unlike the nondescript facade of the "maison rustique" that served as its gas chamber, the silhouette of the Natzweiler camp is immediately identifiable to a visitor as that of a concentration camp. "Konzentrationslager Natzweiler", as it is today identified on the wooden sign above the gate, looks no different from the photographs of other death camps and slave-labour holding pens that dotted the Polish countryside and stood beside bustling towns in eastern Germany. Here in France this one still stands, with its heavy gates and square watchtowers, surrounded by double fences of barbed wire. Inside, at the top of a slope, you can look past the gallows on its stagelike platform, over the site of the razed barracks,

The present-day gate is a post-war addition. Two of Nigel Smith's team on guard.

the outlines of their foundations still visible on the ground, down towards the still-standing punishment-cell bunker and the adjacent crematorium with its tall black chimneys. Beyond the surrounding barbed wire there is a clear view of the magnificent mountains and above them the endless sky with its wind-driven clouds.



The camp was declared an official memorial site on January 8, 1950. This general view shows the gallows in the centre with the punishment block on the left-hand side and crematorium on the right.



The first camp commander (Lagerkommandant) was SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Hüttig, replaced by Egon Zill in April 1942. He was succeeded in tha autumn of 1943 by Josef Kramer (later of Bergen-Belsen fame, see *After the Battle* No. 89). Before that, Kramer had been the camp's Schutzhaftlagerführer — commander of the prisoner section of the camp. The last Kommandant, from May to November 1944, was SS-Sturmbannführer Fritz Hartjenstein. *Left:* **In this picture — the only photograph known to have been taken while the camp was in operation — Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler is seen (centre) being received by Hartjenstein (fifth from right). The latter was tried by a British military court in 1946 for his part in the murder of four SOE women agents and sentenced to life imprisonment.** *Right:* **A precise comparison is difficult because the original barrack hut was destroyed by fire in 1976 and now a new perimeter fence has been erected behind the camera.**

'Just outside the gates of the camp, on the afternoon of July 6, 1944, a work detail of prisoners digging ditches under heavy guard witnessed an extraordinary thing. A car drove up to the gate and out of it soldiers led four people who were brought within the gates and shortly afterwards led down the stepped path to the prison block. They wore decent clothes and carried personal belongings and were not like the usual prisoners transferred from other camps, starved, emaciated, broken, hobbling, sometimes shoeless, in remnants of civilian clothes or uniforms. That much was unusual. What was truly extraordinary — so much so that, in the few minutes it took for the new arrivals to walk from the gate down the path to the blockhouse, every detail could be remembered clearly years afterwards by those who had witnessed the scene — was that the four were women and members of SOE. That same night they were murdered by lethal injection, and their bodies burnt, like so many others, in the crematorium oven.

'Natzweiler was a camp for men, held no women prisoners, had no facilities for women, and the 30 women who had been brought there as human guinea pigs and asphyxiated in the gas chamber outside the camp gates had never lived in the camp proper. This was the first glimpse of ordinary women, dressed in ordinary clothes, that prisoners of Natzweiler had seen, some of them for months, some for years.

'Natzweiler-Struthof was the only extermination camp on French soil. It lay among the wooded ravines of a territory west of the Rhine over which Germany and France had fought repeatedly for centuries and in which loyalties were deeply divided by language and national allegiance. In the Second World War the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were not considered to be an occupied part of a conquered enemy like other parts of France; the victorious Germans considered the area to have been reabsorbed into the Reich, like Austria at the time of the Anschluss.

'In 1939 the spot on a hill bordering the pine forests of Natzweiler and Barembach, both havens for hikers and mushroom gatherers, had been a popular ski resort. Its north and west exposures brought icy winds all year, and its gentle slopes were covered by the heavy swirling snows of winter. Postcards of the 'thirties show winter sports enthusiasts in front of the hotel with their wide wooden skis and toboggans. Towards the end of the first year of the German occupation of France, late in 1940, German officials installed themselves in the former Hôtel de Tourisme and asked the local authorities to provide workers to build a road — which would later be known as the "Route du Désespoir" — up to the summit of the Struthof hill from the station at Rothau, so that materials and prisoners could be transported there to construct the camp. Described by a survivor as "walking skeletons in rags", they carried up on their backs the stones and beams to build their own prison. Only a handful of them were still

The four agents of the Special Operations Executive murdered by lethal injection on July 6, 1944. L-R: Andrée Borrel (codename 'Denise'). Born in Paris in November 1919, she was parachuted into France in September 1942 as a liaison agent to the 'Prosper' circuit and arrested in June 1943. Vera Leigh ('Simone'), born Leeds March 1903, reached France in May 1943 and worked with the 'Inventor' network. She was arrested in October 1943. Sonia Olschanezky ('Suzanne Ouvrard'), a Parisien born in December 1923, worked with the 'Juggler'/'Robin' circuits, arrested in January 1944. Diana Rowden ('Paulette'), a Londoner born in January 1915, was arrested in November 1943 while with the 'Acrobat' circuit.

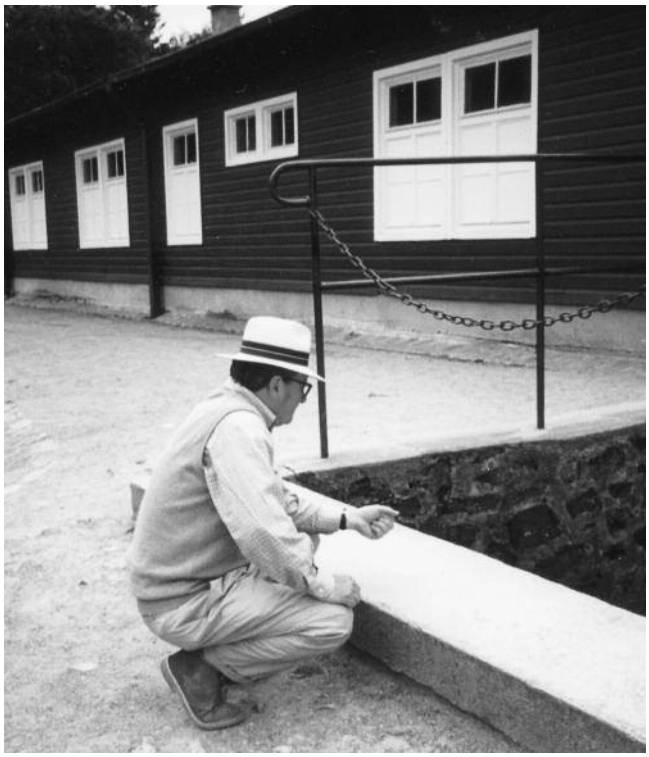
Medical experiments at Natzweiler included using poisonous gasses on 170 inmates (October 42 – September 44); those to find a cure against typhus on 115 inmates of whom 31 died (May 43 – September 44) and against jaundice. In June 1943, 109 Jews, four Russians and two Poles were transferred from Auschwitz to Natzweiler to be used by Strasbourg University Hospital, who were mainly interested in enlarging their collection of skeletons. Between August 11-19, 1943, 87 of these were gassed in the camp's gas chamber. *Left:* **Here, a member of the Resistance points out the autopsy table located in the mortuary in the crematorium block. (USNA)** *Right:* **Over 50 years later virtually nothing has changed, save repairing the pane of glass!**

there when the camp was liberated four years later by the US Seventh army.

'The camp existed for the purpose of inflicting suffering and death. It was intended that those who were sent there should disappear, in circumstances as brutal and degrading as possible, after being used to work in the nearby quarries and underground munitions factories until their strength gave out. They were kept on a starvation diet, were barely clothed in the icy winter, received no medical attention except for those who were experimented on, and were constantly subject to the whims of sadistic guards.

'The overcrowded barracks were ruled over by prisoners who had been transferred from the civil jails, many of them those who had been convicted of violent crimes. Prisoners were made to stand at attention for hours in their thin striped uniforms during roll-calls in the freezing pre-dawn or winter evenings, when the outlines of the surrounding mountains and thoughts of life beyond them kept some of them on their feet and drove others mad. Those who dropped were left to lie there. Those who tried to escape were hanged slowly in front of the assembled prisoners; those guilty of other infractions, such as trying to smuggle letters out of the camp or trading food for a pair of shoes, were tied to a wooden rack and beaten with a whip by a fellow-prisoner until they were unconscious, or placed in solitary confinement for up to three days in a cagelike space too small to stand up or lie down in. To amuse themselves, guards might force a prisoner out of the line of march on the way to the quarries, then machine-gun him "for attempting to escape". On occasion they organised hunts, setting hungry attack dogs on prisoners selected for the sport.

'Fewer than 100 SS guards were needed to oversee the thousands of prisoners in the camp, since escape past the double high-voltage electrified fencing was next to impossible and since the violent criminals among them were made responsible for maintaining discipline over the rest, weakened by hunger and broken by physical punishment. Most of the specially trained German personnel had vol-



The camp was built to accomodate 1,500 prisoners. The average number in 1943 was some 2,200, rising to some 7,000 by September 1944. In total, between September 1940 and November 1944, 46,000 people were entered into the camp's register, but the total number of prisoners present has been estimated at 70,000. It is believed that at least 25,000 perished, some 10,000-12,000 of these in Natzweiler itself (the others being sent on to other camps). *Left:* **The same Resistance fighter with a stretcher at the top of the steps at the rear of the crematorium. Bodies were taken down to the boiler room below ground for temporary storage. Corpses could then be brought up to the furnace by means of a hand-operated lift. (USNA)** *Right:* **One of the team contemplates the ghosts of the past at a spot which has remained timeless.**

unteered for the concentration camp assignment. It was considered preferable to being at the Russian front. The prisoners themselves were made to perform most of the work, including the loading of bodies into the crematorium. All in all, it was a system designed to meet the needs of Nazi policy, including being economically profitable, and did not vary much from the regime at all the other camps to the east.

'Aside from geography, one thing set Natzweiler in France apart from those other extermination camps to the east. It was not the brutality systematically practised, not the human misery endured, or even the utter hopelessness of those within or the indifference of those outside. Those were the same in all the places designed to carry out German policy of the time, the Nazi doctrine of superior and inferior races. The difference had to do with the prisoner population, with who was sent there to be obliterated and why.

'By 1944, on any given day, among the three to four thousand prisoners crowded three to a bunk in Natzweiler were men, or the shadows of those who had once been men, of every nationality. Most were Poles, Russians, and French; some were Germans, Italians, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Norwegians and Dutch. At various times there were a few British including approximately 200 Channel Islanders and a handful of SAS and SOE personnel most of whom were murdered in the camp. About three-quarters of those in the camp were political prisoners. Among the rest were civilians from Poland, Russia, and France who had been conscripted for forced labour in Germany, had tried to escape and been recaptured.

'What all of these men had in common was some sense of the reason they were there. Unlike the Jews in Germany and the conquered countries of the greater Reich who had been herded into boxcars and delivered to the killing factories in the East, what happened to these men had at least a logic of evil. The Jews of Europe had done nothing but be what they were born, and could do nothing to influence their fate. Their persecutors looked on them with loathing, with contempt, as less than human.

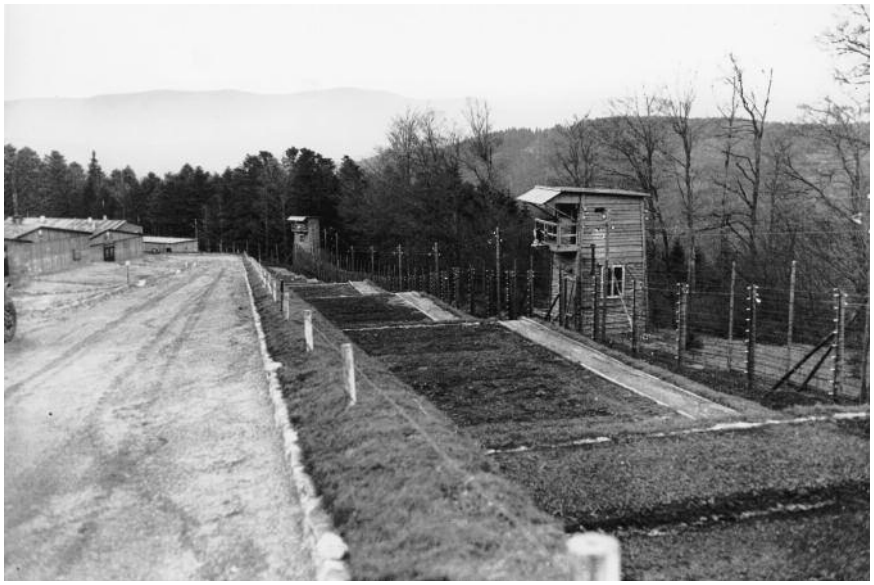
'The prisoners at Natzweiler, especially the "politicals", knew at least — and it does not minimize their suffering to recognise the fact — that they had done something, committed some act, made some decision they could look on as a moral choice or a spiritual necessity, in some way an expression of their individuality. What had brought them to this was a voluntary act of will. Their tormentors looked on them not with disgust but with hatred. They feared them. And in so doing left them at least their pride, their self-respect.

'In addition to being shaved and disinfected and stripped of all personal belongings on being admitted to the camp, the

Evacuation of the camp began in early September 1944 (due to the Allied armies approaching the Vosges area), large inmate groups leaving for Dachau on the 2nd and 3rd. The evacuation continued for several weeks, many inmates going to smaller satellite camps in south-west Germany: Asbach, Dautmergen, Erzingen, Kochendorf, Bisingen, Echterdingen airfield, Hailfingen, Haslach, Hessental, Leonberg, Mannheim, Unterriexingen, Neckarelz, Neckargartach, Schömberg, Schörzingen and Vaihingen. Many of these 'Aussenkommandos' were as deadly as the main camp, involving work in quarries, mines and underground factories. *Left:* **The lift shaft to the furnace room. (USNA)** *Right:* **The wall behind now bears a plaque recording the names of the 107 members of the French Resistance network 'Alliance' who were murdered by the SS during the night of September 1/2, 1944.**

The crematorium — preserved as a stark reminder of Natzweiler's horrific past.

Behind the visitor is the plaque, unveiled in 1975 in the presence of the President of France, to the four murdered SOE agents.



The watchtowers from which the armed SS guards monitored the Natzweiler camp each had a balcony with searchlight. (USNA)

prisoners at Natzweiler were classified by the Germanically methodical camp administrators according to various categories. Each wore an identifying symbol, in the case of the largest numbers a green triangle for the ordinary convicts, with a special point on that for dangerous criminals, and a red triangle for the condemned political prisoners, with a letter indicating the prisoner's nationality. The smaller groups were identified by purple triangles for conscientious objectors (Jehovah's Witnesses), pink for homosexuals, and black for "anti-socials", who, along with the greens, were put in charge of the work gangs.

'A special category was reserved for captured maquis partisans and members of other resistance organizations. These prisoners, classified as "NN", were identified by a red cross on the back of their uniforms and red stripes on the trousers and a yellow patch with three black circles making a convenient target over the heart.

'"NN" stood for "Nacht und Nebel", or night and fog, a phrase that was the inspiration of a particularly cultured Nazi official fond of Goethe and of Wagner, in whose admired operas he found the appropriate term for those who were meant to disappear without trace. The "NN" prisoner was considered to have no further rights nor even any longer any legal existence. He was not permitted to receive or send mail or packages, and his name was written in the camp records in pencil, so it could be erased and any memory of him obliterated when he finally disappeared, as was intended, into the night and fog.

'For all prisoners', concludes Rita, 'admittance to Natzweiler was tantamount to a death sentence. Those who were physically strong enough to withstand the slave labour and were not shot or hung could expect to succumb to psychological and moral disintegration, disease and malnutrition. The life expectancy of a prisoner was not worth reckoning. It took a combination of extraordinary will and extraordinary luck to survive.'

This then was the camp of Natzweiler and this the living death which those unfortunate enough to be incarcerated therein had to endure. Today the camp is the National Memorial of the Deported, and to it come thousands of visitors of every nation, every year, some out of curiousity, some making a pilgrimage, and even a few who were themselves victims of the concentration camp system. A moving evening vigil is held every year on the third weekend in June.

Most of the watchtowers still stand, though now with their balcony facades closed. The perimeter fences also remain complete with rows of insulators which once carried the electrified barbed wire.

In 1944, all the barrack buildings save the one on the right-hand side at the top of the slope were burned to the ground to eradicate disease and only the concrete bases remain to be seen today. Unfortunately the sole survivor was almost certainly destroyed by arson in May 1976 but was rebuilt in similar fashion and now houses the camp museum. The central memorial was dedicated by Président Charles de Gaulle on July 23, 1960 *(right)*.

J